



ART OF CHARACTERISATION FEMALE CHARACTERS

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ABSTRACT

A novel constitutes of, story, theme, characters and plot. A good story and well-drawn characters-appeal to readers. Character is an indispensable factor of a novel as the story cannot develop without characters. Characters keep the story moving through actions and dialogues. It is not the consistency of action that makes a novel true to human nature and human experience but the consistency of motive and character. Percy Lubbock in his book *The Craft of Fiction* maintains that a novelist can either describe the characters from outside as an impartial observer or he can make one his persona and speaks through him and affect to be in the dark as to the motives of the rest. So a novelist can either assume omniscient position to watch around with god's eye view or be subjective.



KEYWORDS : Indian English writer, Parsi writing, Indian Muse, ethnic group.

INTRODUCTION

Female Characters

About the representation of women in literature in nineteenth-century fiction Peter Barry comments:

The representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialization', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. Feminists pointed out, for example, that in nineteenth-century fiction very few women work for a living, unless they are driven to it by dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack these. (Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 122)

Mistry's female characters are twentieth century women. He has created many female characters. They are the women of substance. He has created his women characters as one of two types that defines women as either pure and silent-suffering or deceitful women. Male characters are cast in tradition-based moulds, but as the novel progresses we see movement away from constructive forms. Men and boys adapt to circumstances, strive to achieve personal goals: in the process they become human. By contrast, the women in novels do not rise above their cast. Their submissive standard deeply rooted in Indian tradition, is simple and rigid, based on loyalty and chastity. A woman's worth is tied directly to the sum of her wifely qualities.

In *Such a Long Journey* the contrast in Mistry's portrayal of men and women is forceful in the case of Dinshawji and his wife. She is portrayed as a wife neglectful of her husband's sexual needs. Certainly at this

point in the novel, our tendency to judge her callously is tempered by the fact that the assessment has been provided by Dinshawji. Resisting the romantic overtures of a man afflicted by chronic disease may be as indicative of a well defined sense of self-preservation. The pair is established as a classic comedy couple: a distinctly Parsi version of the Shrew and her husband.

As the novel *Such a Long Journey* moves forward however, Dinshawji's actions force us to reassess his character. When disease finally drags him down, we are given a touching portrait of Dinshawji in the ambulance ride to the hospital. Mistry seems to pardon his character's unsuitable sexual hunger. Dinshawji's wife Alamai is clearly not meek. We value her character heavily on the basis of our implied acceptance of the submissive woman's standard. Alamai has failed to stand by her man. Mistry does not allow the development of her character.

As Gustad observes Dinshawji lingers around the typist's desk flattering her for being, "not scared of my big, naught snake," he admires Laurie's "patience and svelte figure." Dinshawji's tomfoolery was not overlooked. Gustad's reactions strongly imply that his urges are understandable. Later Dinshawji explains that Laurie, like all women who have gone to Catholic school, is a "hot-hot thing," Some scene awkwardly sidestep the issue of abuse by raising questions about Laurie Coutino's character. Dinshawji's misbehaviour and steadily worsening drive of sexual harassment rises as he gets sicker from a fatal disease reaches a new low one day. While describing his erotic conduct in the office Mistry narrates:

He stopped singing, and said, panting, "Laurie, Laurie, one day I must' introduce you to my little lorri." She smiled, ignorant of the Parsi slang for the male member. "Oh yes," he continued, "You will love to play with my sweet lorri. What fun we will have together." She nodded pleasantly, and around them, the men guffawed, digging one another in the ribs. Gustad winced. Dinshawji was going too far. But Laurie smiled again, a little puzzled, and uncovered her typewriter. (SLJ 146)

Mistry deliberately constructs uncertainty around Laurie Coutino. Her meeting with Gustad to discuss Dinshawji's harassment is deliberately charged with sexual tension. When Gustad follows her in the hotels staircase he is painfully aware of her "bottom undulating at his eye level... within nibbling range." (SLJ 174) He observes Laurie's upper lip with its, "exquisite curve, the hint of a pout that accounted for her sexiness." (SLJ 174)

Mistry's depiction of Laurie's manners is problematic. At best, given the circumstances of their meeting, it is utterly illogical. Laurie wants to meet in privacy to protect her reputation, but raises no objections when Gustad unwittingly leads her into a private restaurant room. Laurie insists that they stay for a meal and is clearly more at ease in the surroundings than Gustad.

We discover that Laurie is a good sport, and doesn't mind Dinshawji's jokes and his acting. Her character does not grow beyond the limits imposed by the prototype it is based on. Mistry's depictions of women and girls are rich in compassion but on a structural and conceptual level, he consistently makes this character short.

Roshan is portrayed compassionately. There are disparities between the development of her character and that of her brothers. Character of Darius, is fully developed as an active young man, full developed as an active young man, full of interests and aspirations. His physique identifies him as his father's son. Mistry does not write about Roshan's interests and aspirations. Illness limits her scope of action. She does not earn her prized doll but wins it in a lottery. Her main function in the plot is to reveal the constructive traits of other characters. She is a helpless, meek and passive girl.

The most developed female character in the novel is Dilnavaz. She is the model of wifely virtue. Her strong points and shortcomings are copiously mentioned. Her daily routines documented in detail. She is the only female character in the novel with a revealed personal life. However she is an imperfect character. She is hardworking and defends her family with the firmness. She is selfless woman. Her lack of self-interest indicates her undeveloped character. She shows courage by stepping into the quarrel of Gustad and Sohrab.

Mistry's female characters are generally anxious, highly sensitive but alienated in a world of dream and fantasy, separated from their surroundings as an outcome of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with

the reality. They always differ in their ideas from others and venture on a long voyage of contemplation in order to trace out the meaning of their existence. An author pointing out the psychological aspects of characters has to employ a certain design by which the interior working of the character's mind is unfolded to the readers gradually with the progress of the narration.

Gustad's sharing his problems with Dilnavaz amounts to his internal debate. She takes action outside of her husband's authority and indulges in to black magic but it illustrates a basic structural flaw that ruins Mistry's depiction of women in *Such a Long Journey*. The women in this novel seem mere plot devices. They are objects through which men disclose their characters. We are left with a sense of incompleteness.

Parsi ethnicity is rooted in the patriarchal society of ancient Iran and this patriarchal setup is reinforced by their settlement in India. Parsi women's world is as reductive as that of Hindu and Muslim women in India. Connection with the British Raj gave Parsis a thin glaze of westernization. In British India, unimpeded by the Hindu caste system, the Parsis moved ahead and became the most westernized. Though some rich Parsis educated their daughters, the most of the Parsi women got little education and were subjected to repressions of a strict patriarchy. Though Parsis are considered as the most progressive community in India, child marriages, shortened schooling and multiple childbirths directed the fate of Parsi women till recently.

Dilnavaz, her daughter Roshan and their neighbour Miss Kutpitia are female typecasts. They show the secondary status of women in Indian society. Dilnavaz is soft and beautiful. Male aggressiveness and female passivity is seen in a Noble family. The child Roshan is a sickly girl. She is contrast to the sons Sohrab and Darius. Like a typical daughter in the Indian families she is loved by her father.

Household tasks and its labour is the fate of Dilnavaz in Rohinton Mistry's first novel, *Such a Long Journey*. Her husband-the man-is an active contributor in the time of crisis but she is just a hapless bystander. Her eldest son goes away from the family and her husband's life is endangered by ominous elements outside her. She accepts the remedy of superstition and prayers. Dilnavaz is painstaking homemaker. She is an indetachable nurse. When Gustad is away, she shields her family with the persistence. We realize the courage it takes for her to step between Gustad and Sohrab in the heat of a violent quarrel. We get a shock when she takes a blow from Gustad's heavy belt proposed for their rebellious son. The woman is selfless. Mistry portrays this trait as a virtue in the novel.

Miss Kutpitia is the typical unmarried woman. Miss Kutpitia lives a life of independence. While describing her behaviour and talkativeness Mistry writes:

But there were not many in the building she could talk to about her bones, or anything else, for that matter, because of the reputation she had acquired over the years, of being mean and cranky and abusive. To children, Miss Kutpitia was the ubiquitous witch of their fairy stories come to life. They would flee past her door, screaming, 'Run from the daaken! Run from the daaken!' as much from fear as to provoke her to mutter and curse, and shake her fist. Stiff bones or not, she could be seen moving with astonishing alacrity when she wanted to, darting from window to balcony to stairs if there were events taking place in the outside world that she wished to observe. (SLJ 2)

Mistry sympathy for the mentally retarded Tehmul as he copulates with Roshan's stolen doll. However, he does not show sympathy for Miss Kutpitia's obvious disturbed behaviour, which is caused by her widowhood and repressed sexuality. Mistry does not allow sexuality to his female characters. Dilnavaz interacts only in a Romantic way with her husband. On the contrary, Mistry's male characters like Dinshawji frequently indulge into sexual imageries and jokes. He does not repress his instinct. Gustad's mild reactions for him strongly imply that his urges are understandable.

Dina is the central character of the novel *A Fine Balance*. Her brother Nusswan mistreats her. He does not allow her to visit her friends. He makes her do the household chores and she is expected even to polish his shoes. After Mrs. Shroff's death, in spite of her keen desire to continue her education, she is not even permitted to matriculate. He tries to force her to marry a person of his choice. However, Dina

protests and asserts her individuality. She marries Rustom Dalal, whom she loves intensely. Dina is the symbol of the 'new woman' who refuses to be timid and does not

accept the orthodox, feminine role assigned to her. Even on that cruel night, when her husband died, she behaved in a very noble manner. Mistry describes:

No wailing, no beating the chest or tearing the hair like you might expect from a woman who had suffered such a shock, such a loss (FB 46).

Dina refuses to collapse and determines to reform her life without being economically dependent on a man. Her quest for selfhood and her emergence as a strong, progressive and an independent woman forms the ideal of the novel. She fetches two tailors, Ishvar and Om and starts working for Au Revoir Exports.

Mistry discusses another perspective of Indian reality, i.e. gender discrimination and in his novel *A Fine Balance*. He asserts that every aspect of Indian society is 'gendered' giving specific advantages to men and disadvantages to women. Women are reduced in importance to a subordinate status in family and society. They are expected to be dutiful and faithful. Patriarchy defines the area of women. When a son was born to Radha and Narayan, sweets were distributed and everyone expressed joy with them at the happy occasion. However, when daughters were born to them, no sweets were distributed. When Shankar's mother was born, her drunken father sliced off her nose in his rage, disappointed with the mother for producing a daughter instead of a son. Avinash's three sisters were aware of their father's sad plight at not being able to afford dowries for them. In order to spare their parents the shame of three unmarried daughters, they committed suicide by hanging from a ceiling fan. The writer highlights the injustices done to women, interrogates the marginalisation of women in the male-dominated society and argues that inequality between the sexes is caused by the cultural construction of gender differences.

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Faces like priest Dustoor Framji, known as Dustoor Daab-Chaab for his tendency to squeeze young women who come his way, and Dina Dalal herself, with an innate kindness that sits on her

form like her favourite blue dress are totally convincing. At that point, in the novel we feel that she is a victim of repression and exploitation by the dominated society. The way the novelist describes the priest's conduct here clear any doubt:

Before commencing the ceremony, Dustoor Framji unctuously shook Mrs. Shroff's hand and gave Dina a prolonged hug of the sort he reserved for girls and young women. His reputation for squeezing and fondling had earned him the title of Dustoor Daabchaab, along with the hostility of his colleagues, who resented not so much his actions but his lack of subtlety, his refusal to disguise his embraces with fatherly or spiritual concern. They feared that one day he would go too far, drool over his victim or something, and disgrace the fire-temple (FB 19).

Mistry's *A Fine Balance* revolves around patriarchal tyranny and repression as far as its women protagonist is concerned. The women have still to go a long way to attain complete independence. Dina attempts to liberate herself from her brother Nusswan first by refusing to marry after the death of her husband, only make her pass through a fiery ordeal to earn her livelihood by taking to tailoring. When her eyesight fails her, she hires two tailors and keeps one paying guest to supplement her income. In the process, she is tormented by the landlord for illegally carrying on the business and accommodating the tailors and the student as guests. Ultimately, she is left alone to carry on the burden of her life and compelled to take refuge at her brother, which she never liked. Mistry's comment is pertinent here:

Independence came at a high price: a debt with a payment schedule of hurt and regret. But the other option under Nusswan's thumb was inconceivable. (FB 473)

The novel opens with a train journey and concludes with 'Epilogue: 1984,' with Mrs. Dalal closing doors after completing her journey of woman of emancipation and self-realisation. Indeed *A Fine Balance* reveals betrayal and suppressed womanhood of Mrs. Dina Dalal.

In *Family Matters*, Mistry portrays characters from various communities like Parsis, Muslims, and Hindus. He depicts different kinds of women of the Parsi community. He has pictured all types of women, the tender and home loving Roxana, the arrogant and bold Coomy, and the docile and musical Daisy. Roxana is presented as a nice, loving woman.

In sustaining various families, the women characters play vital roles as portrayed by Rohinton Mistry. With exception of Nariman Vakeel, all other male characters are lightly delineated in comparison to the female characters. The novelist may not have consciously projected the 'ladies' of the novel as strong but as a realist, he could not ignore the significant role a woman plays in protecting her family and in sustaining the community. Gerda Lerner has rightly pointed out :

While men conquered territory and built institutions which managed and distributed power, women transmitted culture to the young and built the social network and infrastructures that provide continuity in the community. (Lerner, 179)

Female characters provide family strength in *Family Matters*. While the men are absorbed in dreams or in memories of the lost glorious past, the women successfully conceal their own frustrations. This feminist facet of the novel may not be clear or it might not have been in the author's main design. It shows sustaining role of women in a society suffering from collapsing values.

Roxana appears to constitute the most balanced personality of all the significant female characters. In spite of Yezad's pronounced hostility, Roxana continues to take care of her father without complaining and provides his needs to the best of her ability and when during Roxana's absence Yezad is compelled to help Nariman with the bedpan with his sons' assistance, he wonders how his wife managed alone. Roxana's accommodating personality delights Rangarajan, the plasterer who considered her an excellent example of womanhood, defending in strong words after realizing that she was merely a housewife. He says:

What are you saying, dear lady? Housewifery is the most important calling, requiring umpteen talents. Without housewife there is no home; without home, no family. And without family, nothing else matters, everything from top to bottom falls apart or descend into chaos. Which is basically the malady of the West. (FM 175)

Mr. Rangrajan's comments about Roxana as a housewife are commendable because on woman's shoulders inevitably rests the responsibility of laying the strong foundation of a sound family due to her unique quality of putting the household together. Nevertheless, the work of a housewife demands a lot of sacrifice. Roxana is an epitome of sacrifice. This sacrifice means repression of lot of desires.

Thus among three major female characters from three different novels Dilnawaz and Roxana are portrayed as meek and submissive characters. They support their husbands. They play vital roles in sustaining their families. Dina is a strong character who protests and asserts her individuality. She is the symbol of the 'modern woman' who declines to be submissive and does not accept the feminine role assigned to her. Indeed the characters Dilnavaz, Roxana and Dina linger for the long time in the minds of the readers. They haunt our memory long after we have read the novels which contain their contribution to the respective families.

Apart from the plot-construction and his subject matters, Rohinton Mistry also focuses his mind on characterisation. Most common and chief way of characterisation is the participation of characters in action. He suggests that modern life and insecurity have become synonymous. He tries to stress the fact that in the postcolonial India, the common people continue to be exploited. He has expressed concern about this in his novels. One of the first impressions one has on a reading of his novels is its rich and diverse Parsi characters. Inevitably, there occur issues related to the moral dimensions of the lives of Mistry's characters. The moral implications of their Parsi lives are compelling.

Mistry has portrayed many flat and round characters. He has created many female characters. His female characters are twentieth century women. They are the women of substance. He has created his women characters as one of two types that defines women as either pure and silent-suffering or deceitful women. The women in the novels do not rise above their cast. Their submissive standard is deeply rooted in Indian tradition.

CONCLUSION:

Character is an indispensable factor of a novel as the story cannot develop without characters. Mistry's female characters are twentieth century women.

He has created his women characters as one of two types that defines women as either pure and silent-suffering or deceitful women.

As the novel *Such a Long Journey* moves forward however, Dinshawji's actions force us to reassess his character.

Later Dinshawji explains that Laurie, like all women who have gone to Catholic school, is a hot-hot thing, some scene awkwardly sidestep the issue of abuse by raising questions about Laurie Coutinos character.

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