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**Rohinton Mistry’s Such a Long Journey: a narrative of Parsi community; their Anxiety, Fear and Sense of insecurity**

**Abstract:** The paper presents Parsis as a minority community who feel sense of insecurity, anxiety, atrophy, and threat in a dominated culture in different time periods. Rohinton Mistry’s novels deal with the life of Indians who suffer from communal disharmony, religious Chauvinism, ethnicity, and cultural diversities. *Such a Long Journey* records the anxieties, uneasiness, problems, and the distinct identity of a Parsi community within the boundary of India, and tried to preserve the ethnic identity of the community. The novel mainly presents realistic picture of the minority community like Parsis who became the victims of the political uncertainties. Mistry raises some problems of community and cultural crisis which are the main issues under the subaltern studies. There is a message that race, ethnicity, or majority are controlling factors on the ideology and cultural make up of particular place where cultural diversity exists. The drift between ethnic culture and majority culture often gives rise to unrest in the National life as well as social structure. It is necessary to steam out the hatred, religious chauvinism and misconceptions through proper channels.

**Keywords:** Parsis in India, Minority, Religious Chauvinism, Sense of Insecurity, Anxiety, Ethnicity.

**Introduction:**

Rohinton Mistry, a contemporary Parsi writer, aims at examining historical events and the way they impacted on individuals and communities as a whole in the post – independent period. India is a country which is known for its incredible religious and cultural diversity but this diversity
often leads to anarchism where some cultures get dominated and others dominate. The dominated one enter into a zone of silence where they are often unheard and difficult to access. Then the obligation falls upon the writers to draw attention to such unheard voices which has been still not raised. Post-independence Parsi writing in English is ethnocentric. Obviously, their literature is characterized by both ethnocentric and minority discourse features. It depicts all concerns of the modern day Parsis who are the minuscule minority in India, experiences ethnic anxieties. They feel identity crisis, insecurity, and feel threatened by possible submersion in the dominant Hindu culture, and a feeling of nightmarish which they do not ever want to come true. Besides these issues like insecurity, threat and identity crisis, there are other disturbing ethnic features such as declining population, late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, alienation, urbanization etc. All these issues find expression in the post-independence Parsi writers.

Literature is a powerful tool in the hands of writers who use it to modulate and change Societal framework. Mistry in his works seek to contribute the process of change and reconsideration of minorities, their rights and status, and radical restructuring of a social thought. He like other Parsi writers distribute the world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of Justice and equality. It has been observed that race, ethnicity or majority are controlling factors on the ideology and cultural make up of particular place where cultural diversity exists. The drift between ethnic culture and majority culture often gives rise to unrest in the National life as well as social structure. It is necessary to steam out the hatred, religious chauvinism and misconceptions through proper channels.

Rohinton Mistry is like other Parsi writers whose literature is considered community specific as in Tales from Firozsha Baag and Such a Long Journey. There are others also, who are community centered in their works like Firdaus Kanga in Trying to Grow, Farrukh Dhondy in Bombay Duck and Bapsi Sidhwa in the Crow Eaters and The Pakistani Bridge. They are all sensitive to their community’s hopes and fears, aspirations and frustrations, Struggles for survival and identity crisis as A. K. Singh points out:

“Their work exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their work though on the surface these work deal with their human protagonists”. (A. K. Singh :66)

Parsis in India:
Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India. Although they are minority in India, their contribution to society, economics, commerce, science, politics and literature has been remarkable. They are small, yet united religious community. In India, they live mostly on the West Coast of subcontinent especially in Mumbai. The Parsis are the followers of Prophet Zoroaster and their religion is known as Zoroastrianism. The original Homeland of the Parsis, an ancient Persian province, is located at present in Southern Iran. In 8th A.D they were forced to flee from their primary space ‘Iran’ and arrived at Sajan in Gujarat in India. They sought refuge from king Jadhav Rana and there, their priest and leader Dustur performed a symbolic action of dropping a ruby-studded gold ring into urn filled with milk and sugar which indicates their willingness, friendship and co-operation to the regions prosperity.

They left their Homeland to preserve their religion from being Islamized by the invading Islamic Arabians. They sought freedom to practice their faith, for that they came to India. The Parsi Zoroastrian would bring the prosperity to that area if granted shelter. Moved by this reasoning of Dastur, Jadav Rana invited him to recite their actual requirements. The Dastur replied that the desired freedom of worship, freedom to bring up young children in their own traditions and land for cultivation so that they become self-reliant. Jadav Rana agree to these demands of the priest. But he on his part put before them five pre-conditions as to adopt Gujarati language, the woman would wear the sari, man should hand over their weapons, venerate the cow, marriage ceremonies shall be performed at night only. The words of Dastur continued to be the basic philosophy of Faith for Parsi Zoroastrian throughout their settlement in India. It also reflects the characteristic spirit of adaptability of this minority community which made possible for them to flourish in India where such diverse cultures and religions exist.

**Such a long journey: An introduction**

Mistry narrates the history of his community in fictional terms in his works. The novel *Such a Long Journey* is a unique in the sense that it is based on factual events. On the surface, the novel deals with the Gustad’s and the Parsi Community but in reality, it covers the major events of post – independent Indian history. Factually, the novel is written somewhat in the manner of non-fiction based on real events and real people. Mistry has interwoven facts and fiction in the fabric in such a way that the novel can be called a faction. Besides, the history, the Parsi Community, their fear and anxieties as a minority are also echoed in the story. The concern of identity of the Parsis through the exploration of their preoccupations and firmness on cultural
heritage is reflected in the novel. The novelist not only describes the fears and anxieties of his vocal, but also passive community which has not only lived peacefully in the vast extensive Indian society, and has accepted the land and contributed to its growth, even though maintained its own cultural and communal specificity. Although, Gustad the protagonist is shown performing and loyally following Parsi traditions and customs, he considers all religions equal. He believes prayer as an instrument to get peace and illumination. The matter of Identity is obviously cleared through various incidents, one of such is the typical Parsi game Kaakerya Kumar which Dinshawji plays with his Wife in the novel. The ancient origin of the Parsi Community is figured out in the dialogue between Malcolm and Gustad to prove their supremacy over others. The conversation between two discloses an important feeling of minorities to sustain their ancient roots and culture to boost their self-image. Gustad living in Khodadad Building, eagerly wishes that his son Sohrab should be world famous so that he can bring fame to the Parsi community as whole and himself also. In fact, such anxiety for identity on both individual and community level is evident throughout the novel. It is clearly visible in their speech that Gustad is continuously disturbed by rising tide of communalism in the post independent India. Rohinton Mistry even expresses his anger against Maratha’s attitude for changing the names. He thought that changing the names means changing identity.

The primary motif of Mistry is to record the anxieties, uneasiness, problems and the distinct identity of a Parsi community within the boundary of India like all other Parsi writers, and he tried his best for the preservation of the ethnic identity of his community. In Such a Long Journey, Mistry takes responsibility as a representative and mouthpiece of the Parsi community, in order to realize how the post-colonial conditions affects the community’s identity. Apart from concern of religion, the historical awareness forms the shape of the collective identity of the Parsi community. Better to have full understanding of Such a Long Journey, it is important to know the history of the Parsi community. Incidents in the novel like Indira Gandhi in political trouble, Nagarwala incident, Indira Gandhi’s guiltiness of corruption and murder etc. are narrated from the perspective of Parsi community. Thus, Mistry’s agenda to present the historical knowledge has great significance from the view of minority community. Nagarwala case is orally transmitted as it claims for the value of indigenous cultural practices. Mistry collided the history and fiction to specifies the self-image of the post–colonial Indian nation. Even though
the Parsi Community is threatened by the politics of Hindu nationalism, so, writing against the main stream is an option for the minority which is marginalized and facing extinction.

**Unheard Voices of Parsis in ‘Such a Long Journey’:**

*Such a long journey* is a fine novel written in 1991, set against the backdrop of political events in India during 1970s. Mistry set this novel at a very crucial point in contemporary Indian history when the Nehruvian era had just ended after Nehru’s sudden death, and soon enter into the deteriorate politics of violence, opportunism and favoritism. In period 1962-1972, India had to take on three successive wars, with China, Pakistan, and for the liberation of Bangladesh. This period also witnessed the rise of communal politics, the emergence of new political policies, politics of votes by the dominant Hindu or Brahmin community of India.

The novel deals with the issues like fear and sense of insecurity which Gustad, the protagonist, feels throughout the novel. Mistry depicts of his community’s relation to political fundamentalist activities and its effects on minority community like on Parsis. The theme of such a long journey revolves around history, politics and the common anxieties of a middle-class man Gustad Noble. Gustad Noble is the protagonist who represents common middle-class man in general and Parsi community in particular. Gustad stays in the Parsi residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay with his wife Dilnawaz and three children Sohrab and Darius, and a daughter Roshan. Gustad’s ancestral family had a glorious and prosperous past. He was once grandson of a prosperous and highly esteemed furniture dealer, and son of an esteemed and reputed bookseller, had allowed himself to be betrayed into bankruptcy by an irresponsible brother, i.e. Gustad’s uncle. Gustad despairs being reduced to the ordinary middle-class lifestyle in his Khodadad Building apartment with his wife Dilnawaz and three children. It reflects in his nostalgic daydream of building a bookcase with the help of Sohrab to arrange his collection of books. He has also inherited the purity of conscience and uprightness of which the Parsis are very proud of; as Anjana Desai rightly said, “his father’s goodness and compassion inform all of Gustad’s actions and relationships which constitute the novel” (Desai, 1994: 132). In his moments of despair and dejection, he used to get relief from the glory of his past. He got upset by the audacious letter of his friend Bilimoria who had suddenly disappeared without informing him. His anger and frustration bursts out after reading the letter as:
After the shameless way he behaved, he had a nerve, writing now to ask for a favour, as though nothing had happened. He could wait till his dying for a reply…. Once again, the furniture from his childhood gathered comfortably about him. The pieces stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of his sanity. (SLJ:6).

To overcome his present petty circumstances with the meager income as a bank clerk, he looks forward to regain his family’s lost prosperity through his eldest son Sohrab when he got admission to the coveted Indian Institute of Technology. He had “made the success of his son’s life the purpose of his own” (SLJ:55). But his pride and the dream of elevation and upliftment to a higher social class that seemed so close to be realized are shattered by Sohrab’s defiant refusal to join in the IIT. The joy of the dinner party to celebrate Sohrab’s admission in IIT along with his beloved daughter Roshan’s ninth birthday is spoiled by Sohrab’s anger. The refusal offends and embitters Gustad when Sohrab bursts out: I’m sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I’m not interested in it. I’m not a jolly good fellow about it, and I’m not going there…. Fool yourself if you want to” (SLJ:48).

Sohrab Instead of IIT he wants to pursue an Arts program with his friends. Gustad, broken-hearted, cannot hold his frustration speaks about his parental duty before his wife Dilnawaz to his son:

What have we been all these years if not patient? Is it how it will end? Sorrow, nothing but sorrow. Throwing away his future without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life and got this to suffer all my life (slapping his hip). But that’s what a father is for. And if he cannot show respect at least, I can kick him again. Out of my house, out of my life! (SLJ:52).

The realization of the waste of Sohrab’s talents and the loss of opportunity and hope, especially in a country where minorities are not at ease is very painful and sense of insecurity for Gustad. The fear, anxiety and the sense of insecurity the minorities feel from the fundamentalists and fanatics like the Shiv Sena in Bombay or the Hindu fundamentalists like Bajrang Dal when early 1970s witnessed the growth of the Shiv Sena with its demand for Maratha Raj. we have got this expression in these words of Gustad:

What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be
like the black people in America-twice as good as the white man to get half as much.

How could he make Sohrab understand this? (SLJ:55).

This statement reveals Gustad’s psychological fear and sense of insecurity about his son’s future and life. He thinks that there is no future for minorities in this country because of fascist activities like Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal who fights only for Marathi people and Marathi language. Such fascist ideology reduced them as black people in America.

Charu Chandra Mishra very significantly said: “It is his only chance to carve out a space for himself and his family in a country where politics of regionalism has named them “the other” (Mishra, 2001: 162).

There is another character Dinshawji, a friend of Gustad who also expresses his fear and grief over the matter of changing names under the pressure of Shiv Sena. For him, names are not only names but an identity and changing names means changing identity. Dinshawji reacts to Gustads question, “What in a name?” (SLJ:74)He counter asserts that renaming is an infliction of linguistic violence on social identity, the erasure of family names connected with the colonial past is seen as an erasure of a personal historical connectedness. He reveals his anguish as:

“You are wrong. Names are so important. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one day the name changes. So, what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all wrong names? Will I get to second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happen to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me.” (SJL:74)

Counter balance to the indignity and struggle of the present are actually the memories of the security and cultural of the past. These governing emotions of loneliness, fear and insecurity is all pervading sense of loss of what the past had symbolized.

Mistry, as mouthpiece of Parsi community,has shown his anger and sense of insecurity towards Indian politics and Indian politicians like Nehru, Indira Gandhi and towards politics of Shivsena of the period. As Parsis feel that Nehru never liked Feroze Gandhi from the beginning do not believe in natural death of Feroze Gandhi. Even they think that the heart attack on Feroze Gandhi was not real reason of his death. Theysuspect about his death and cherished a sense of insecurity. Dilnavaz and Dinshawji has always doubt on the death of Feroze Gandhi as Nehru never liked him as his son-in-law from the beginning. Dilnavaz as expresses her doubt, Dinshawji agrees and says: ‘That was tragic’, “Even today people say Feroze’s heart attack was not really a heart
attack.” (SLJ:197). This is how Parsi men and women expresses their sense of insecurity in India in Such a Long Journey.

They are also reluctant towards Mrs. Indira Gandhi as they were towards Nehru because she made Nationalization of banks throughout the country. This decision makes them to lose their banking business as they were private bank holders. This action of Indira goes against Parsi community who not happy with the decision of Indira Gandhi. In the novel Dinshawji says to Gustad in this connection and recollects the past status of Parsis as:

“What those days were, yaar. What fun we used to have. touched corner his lips to wipe the foam. Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized banks.” (SLJ:38)

This decision disowned them from their old business and make the to feel a kind of restlessness of a community. Gustad is of the view that “nowhere in the world nationalization worked”. (SLJ:38). He opines that the banks have not worked anywhere but it has been done as to get political mileage at the cost of the interests of the Parsi bankers. He charged that her action of demanding separate Maharashtra and all these policies is because of supporting racist buggers and Shiv Sena which results riots, and regrets that they (Parsis) remained as a second-class citizen in the country. Gustad said to Dinshawji that:

“believe me…she is a shrewd woman, these are vote-getting tactics. Showing the poor, she is on their side…. Remember when her pappy was prime minister and he made her president of congress party? At once she began encouraging the demands for a separate Maharashtra. How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused. And today we have that bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second-class citizens. Don’t forget, she started it all by supporting the racist buggers” (SLJ:39)

Mistry depicts how politicians use common Parsi scapegoat for their own ends. As we see as a scapegoat in the novel that falls prey to the politics of Prime Minister Office. When Gustad comes to know that Major Bilimoria has been used as a scapegoat and victimized by Prime Minister Office, he feels upset. Gustad and feels very restless because of Bilimoria’s involvement as a member of Parsi community. Parsi people respected their community ethics and do not want such action which will bring humiliation to their community. They fear and feel
sense of insecurity that such action will take them towards trouble for their community. Vennugopalan said regarding this action as:

“The implication of a member of Parsi community in this crime not only brought ignominy to the community but also a sense of fear about attempted wiping about the Parsis from this hemisphere.” (Vennugopalan, 2004:94)

Earlier, the blow of circumstances and a source of anger is the supposed ‘betrayal event’ of Major Jimmy Bilimoria who had been “more than just a neighbour” and “had been like a loving brother” (SJL:14) of Gustad. The Major had suddenly vanished one morning without saying a word of farewell to anybody, not even to his close friend Gustad, who comes to know later that Jimmy had joined RAW, a wing of Indian Secret Service. The abrupt disappearance of the Major wounded Gustad very much. After a long wait, Gustad receives a letter from Major Jimmy, requesting him to receive a package from the Chorbazar. To the sorrowful Gustad and his family the package turns out to be a huge sum of money; ten lakhs to be deposited in a fictitious account for Major’s guerilla operation. Gustad with the help of his colleague and friend, Dinshawji deposits the money in the bank. As the episode reaches its climax, the arrest of Major Billimoria on charges of corruption is published in the paper which caused fear, uncertainty and restlessness to Gustad. Meanwhile, Ghulam Mohammad calls Gustad in an authoritative tone to withdraw the whole amount in a month’s time as to save Jimmy’s life. To make things worse, Roshan’s illness persists; in fact, she relapses. The misfortune comes with the death of Dinshawji who had risked his job and pension by helping Gustad in depositing and withdrawing Bilimoria’s money in the fake account. Gustad as a father and a friend had prayed at Mount Mary for the lives and recovery of both Roshan and Dinshawji.

Despite the annoyance, Gustad decides to visit Major Bilimoria in Delhi who wants to explain exactly what happened. Bilimoria tells about Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister and the betrayal of his faith in her. It is a big fraud of 60 lakh rupees in which the PM is directly involved as Bilimoria was instructed by the PM to get the money from the SBI Director on an emergency basis and later to cover it up as somebody impersonating the PM’s voice on telephone. Thereafter Major was asked to write a confession which he did without a second thought trusting the PM. But as soon as the money was received, the PM’s office blocked the money before it was used for the aimed purpose. By knowing the trick, the Major kept ten lakh rupees aside for his friend. He was implicated and arrested on the charges of corruption and stealing the money.
He was tortured ruthlessly till he returned the money. After some months, he died a dubious death during his imprisonment. Jimmy is none other than the fictional counterpart of Sohrab Nagarwala who was chief cashier of the Parliament Street branch of the State Bank of India in New Delhi. Relating to the episode Nayantara Sahgal has said:

The outline of his story is based on that of a parallel historical figure – also a Parsi and, by all accounts, an agent of RAW – Captain Sohrab Rustom Nagarwala. On 24 May 1971, the chief cashier of the State Bank of India received a telephone call, apparently from the Prime Minister, instructing him to withdraw six million rupees and hand them over to a person whom he would find waiting on a road, and who would identify himself simply as ‘a man from Bangladesh’. The cashier obeyed these instructions and then went to the Prime Minister’s residence to ask for a receipt. To his surprise, he was told by the Prime Minister’s private secretary that she had made no such telephone call, and advised to contact the police. He did so, and Captain Nagarwala, who had taken delivery of the money, was swiftly arrested. He seemed to have left an easy trail for the police to follow, and confessed that he had impersonated Indira Gandhi’s voice to obtain money to support guerrilla activities in Bangladesh. However, what began to raise suspicions at the time, and what was never adequately explained, was the hasty and highly unorthodox manner in which Captain Nagarwala’s trial was conducted. Three different judges presided over the case in just three days, at the end of which he was sentenced to four years imprisonment. The police failed to produce in court the tape they claimed to have of Nagarwala’s remarkable impersonation of Mrs. Gandhi, and contradictions between his story and that of the State Cashier were never investigated. Moreover, after his arrest, Nagarwala appears to have had a change of heart. From prison, he appealed for a retrial and tried unsuccessfully to gain an interview with a journalist and fellow Parsi from a Bombay weekly newspaper. A few months later Nagarwala was removed to hospital, allegedly complaining of chest pains, where he died in March 1972. (Nayantara Sahgal, 1983: 82)

The incident, as it involved a Parsi, jolted the image of the whole community. It was a big blow to the Parsis image as a very loyal, upright and dependable community. Mistry has taken the Nagarwala incident of this forgery as his major plot in the novel, only to defend his community
against the corrupt and unscrupulous government of Mrs. Gandhi. It is clearly depicted by Mistry that Major Bilimoria is a good person who is falsely implicated in this case, an innocent man victimized by the mean and crooked authorities of the government. Mistry seems to have anger against them who try to ruin benign identity of the Parsis. Nagarwala incident makes clear that the Parsis do not like the involvement of any of their community members in any scandal which may defame their community as whole or as a particular. Maja Daruwala reveals what the community felt about such a blot on their image at that time:

The Nagarwala incident, because it involved a Parsi, jolted the self-image of the community no less. Having long ago lost their literature to the vandalism of Alexander the accursed, and their dance, music, art, poetry and even their language to the process of adapting to a new home in India the Parsis have developed a particularized culture culled from a mixture of ancient myth and legend overlaid by a life-sustaining sense of recent achievement. Gratified to have earned an honorable place in the country of their adoption through their contribution to every field of endeavour and proud of having retained a strong ethical tradition the Parsis were deeply anguished by the ambivalent role Nagarwala had played in the sordid story (Daruwala, 1992:29).

Gustad stands for the marginalized in the novel and challenges the hegemony of the country. It is a significant attempt at self-assertion, which is typical of all post-colonial literatures. Through protagonist of the Novel namely Gustad, Mistry expresses the sense of insecurity and apprehensions of the Parsi community. He attempts to depict the Parsis predicament as minority community in India. Anjana Desai rightly comments on the incident as, “However, these events and the sinister mystery surrounding them serve mainly as a narrative link and a story-telling device” (Desai, 1994: 131)

Mistry underlying his world-view which is expressed through one of his mouthpieces, the pavement artist. One of the most important message Mistry wants to emphasize is religious tolerance on the basis of that all religions are equal. The wall enclosing the Khodadad building gives a sense of security and protection to the inhabitants of building. Gustad who likes the wall as the “sole provider of privacy, especially for Jimmy and Gustad when they did their ‘kustis’ at dawn. Over six feet high, the wall ran the length of the compound, sheltering them from non-Parsis eyes while they prayed with the glow spreading in the east” (SJL:32). As Nilufer Bharucha voices similarly:
The wall both includes and excludes. It is protective as well as reductive. It protects the Parsis community from the ingress of the engulfing Indian world. However, it also makes this world isolationist (Bharucha, 2003: 123)

The wall is often used as a public urinal and polluted by the passers-by. The whole apartment annoyed by the malodor, it spreads, Gustad, in an insightful flash, invites the commercial pavement artist to use it as his canvas and adorn it with the murals of different gods and goddesses of India from all religions. The black wall, miraculously has transformed in to a shrine of races and religions as “A stinking filthy disgrace has become a beautiful, fragrant place which makes everyone feel good” (SJL:289). Anjana Desai says regarding this as: It, thus, becomes a multi-religious shrine …, symbolizing the accommodative and assimilative spirit of the Parsis, not numerically strong enough for a militant assertion of identity (Desai, 1994: 134).

They assert their identity in quite a benign way by revering the ‘others’ faith privately as well as publicly; and at the same time keeping their ‘self-respect’ intact. In the history of their In India, being Diaspora, they have never been aggressive against any other faith. Although every religion has its own identity, in fact, they have been tolerant not only of the Hindu majority but also of other minorities like the Muslims and the Christians. But at the same time, they are watchful enough to maintain the purity of their race by keeping to endogamy and also to resist proselytization with strict ‘NO’. The Parsis have been successful in framing a positive identity by keeping a fine balance between assimilation and resistance that respects the differences of the others including its own in the multicultural existential reality of the country. We are witnessed when on Sundays, Gustad used to visit the Crawford Market with his Christian friend Malcom Saldanha, he would go with him to the church first. He does not give offence to anyone, as attended the Mass, imitating his friend closely, dipping his fingers in the font of holy water, to fit in, and “The first time Gustad was quite intrigued by the church and its rituals, so different from what went on in the fire temple. But he was on his guard, conditioned as he had been from childhood to resist the call of the other faiths. All religions were equal, he was taught; nevertheless, one had to remain true to one’s own because religions were not like garment styles that could be changed at whims or to follow fashion. His parents had been painstaking on this point, conversion and apostasy being as rife as it was rooted in the very history of the land. So, Gustad quickly decided that while music was good and the glittering icons and sumptuous vestments were highly impressive, he preferred the sense of peaceful mystery and individual
serenity that prevailed in the fire temple. Sometimes, it made him wonder, though, if Malcom was not making an amateurish, half-hearted attempt at proselytism” (SLJ:24). Gustad never turns a bigot like Yezad in Family Matters because of the compassion deep seated within his heart and mind. He visits Mount Mary and prays for Roshan and Dinshawji so faithfully and wholeheartedly for their health and for the miracle to happen as “Gustad had learned more about the Church, how it had a tradition of welcoming Parsis, Muslims, Hindus, regardless of caste or creed. Mother Mary helped everyone; she made no religious distinctions” (SJL:222).

Thus, Mistry is sensitive about his community, their uneasiness and threat in different times in India which he raised through his novel such a long journey as Jaydipsinh Dodiya said:

“Mistry is sensitive to the various anxieties felt by his community. He has demonstrated this by responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community in particular, and to the country in general. He presents his community through the different narratives of the characters who invariably express their concerns for their community and the changes that affect them.” (Dodiya, 2006: 44-45)

**Conclusion:** Mistry records atrophy, anxiety, uneasiness, sense of insecurity, ethnicity and feeling of threat in his community through his novel such a long journey. There is a message that race, ethnicity or majority are controlling factors on the ideology and cultural make up of particular place where cultural diversity exists. The drift between ethnic culture and majority culture often gives rise to unrest in the National life as well as social structure. It is necessary to steam out the hatred, religious chauvinism and misconceptions through proper channels. Mistry in his works seek to contribute the process of change and reconsideration of minorities, their rights and status, and radical restructuring of a social thought. He like other Parsi writers distribute the world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of Justice and equality.
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Religious Minorities: their sense of insecurity, anxiety and threat with special reference to Rohinton Mistry’s novel ‘Family Matters’

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Abstract: The paper presents religious minorities especially Parsis, Muslims and Christians who feel sense of insecurity, anxiety and threat in a dominated culture through different time periods and crisis as presently felt by Muslims and Dalits. Rohinton Mistry has written three novels Such a Long Journey (1991), A Fine Balance (1996) and Family Matters (2002). He has portrayed India in his works. Although he left his homeland India, and is immigrant writer, but his novels are true picture of India in its social, political and cultural sense. His novels often deal with the life of Indians who suffer from communal disharmony, religious and caste discriminations, religious Chauvinism, ethnicity and cultural diversities. His novels mainly present realistic picture of the minority community of the Parsi people, its fears, anxieties, sense of insecurity, helplessness because of the political uncertainties. He raises some problems of minorities and cultural crisis which are the main issues under the subaltern studies, a key term of post-colonial theory. This paper would present Rohinton Mistry’s novel Family Matters in which he has shown these minority issues after the time of demolition of Babri Mosque. Besides these it will present the threat of declining population of Parsis.

Keywords: Religious Minorities, Sense of Insecurity, Anxieties, Religious Chauvinism, Threat of Decline.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rohinton Mistry is the most prominent English writers of Post-Independence India. He has written of three novels: Such a Long Journey (1991), A Fine Balance (1996) and Family Matters (2002). He has portrayed India in his works. Although he left his homeland India, and is immigrant writer, but his novels are true picture of India in its social, political and cultural sense. Rohinton Mistry in his novels have presented the grim view of Indian life, and have observed the sufferings of the marginalized people, minority communities, the poor and the downtrodden of the Indian society. His novels deal with the backdrop of the Post-Independence history of India. They have included all important events of India since Independence. He raises some problems of minorities and cultural crisis which are the main issues under the subaltern studies, a key term of post-colonial theory. The present paper is the study of Religious minorities especially Parsis, Muslims and Christians who feel sense of insecurity, fear and threat in a dominated culture in different time periods or crisis as presently felt by Muslims and Dalits in India. My Study attention of present paper would be on Rohinton Mistry’s novel Family Matters in which he has shown these minority issues after the time of demolition of Babri Mosque. Besides these it will present the threat of declining population of Parsis which is the serious matter of concern as a secular country.

It is necessary to steam out the hatred, misconceptions through proper channels. It has been observed that race, ethnicity or majority are controlling factors on the ideology and cultural make up of particular place. The drift between ethnic culture and majority culture often gives rise to unrest in the National life. In such times of crisis, it is necessary to come in terms of reality by admitting and respecting the differences as a vital aspect of human existence and inculcating tolerance towards other i.e. religion, cultural, national, ethnic and lingual etc.

Literature is a powerful tool in the hands of writers to modulate and change Societal framework. Mistry in his works seek to contribute the process of change that has already started the world over, involving a reconsideration of minorities, their rights and status, and radical restructuring of a social thought. Mistry like other Parsi writers distribute the world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of Justice and equality and is truly human.

India is a country of tremendous religious and cultural diversity but this diversity often leads to anarchy where some cultures get subjugated and others dominate. The dominated one enter a zone of silence which is
rather difficult to access. Then the responsibility falls upon the writers to highlight such ‘others’ and raise their voice which has been still unheard. Ethnicity and cultural identity has become the major issues in the multicultural, multi-ethnic and pluralist Nations. Rohinton Mistry successfully bring out the marginalization of the ever dwindling Parsi community only various counts in this turmoil ridden world. Mistry has the capacity to mix Universal themes with the particularity of individual lines. His works are an expression of Parsi sensibility that are rooted in the community in which he has been raised. He has not only raise the problems of Parsi community but other communities also.

Present issues of minorities:

Today, as we are aware about the matter of fact that the different religious minorities feel sense of insecurity, anxiety and threat because of rapidly growing problems in India on the basis of nationalism, religion, food ban like beef, Gaurakshak, love Jihad, Islamophobia etc. we see India’s shift from egalitarianism to majoritarianism in the character of our nationalism carriers, of course, particularly dangerous consequences for minorities. We as a secular state no longer aspire to transform our society and hardly attempt to examine it. All our national attention seems insidiously focused on the affairs and issues of Muslims and Dalits. Past few months their whole way of life is dissected, analyzed and critiqued on prime time on a regular basis. Nowadays, burning issues of country like India seems; what Muslims eat, what Muslims wear, how they pray, how they divorce and so on. It is not because of common Hindu but it is all about the game of different political leaders and conservative religious preachers who make their ends with sacrifice of human concern. These are not only in Hindu religion but also in other religions like, in Muslim, Christians, Parsis etc. The Hindu right wing has started a concerted campaign against all religious minorities including Muslims. The main features of this campaign include protests against the so-called love jihad, gharwapsi (homecoming) initiatives which convert Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism. Attacks centered on cow-related issues have been seen over the past eight years, but, past few months, it rapidly increased as we can be witnessed through media whether it would be print, electronic, social media or Google searches with keywords that included: cow vigilantes, Gau-Rakshaks, beef lynching, cow slaughter, cattle thieves, beef smugglers and cattle traders. Recently imposed a ban on beef trading or as a food are increased the sense of insecurity, threat, fear among not only Muslims but other minorities also like Dalits who are becoming the victims of mob lynching. The ban on beef disproportionately harm poor Muslims and Dalits working in meat and leather industries. These are the signs of growing intolerance and a gradual process of de-secularization which do not bode well for religious minorities in India. Regarding with this matter recently the protest was held at different places in India like, at Jantar Mantaretc. in Delhi against these mob lynching on minorities entitled as ‘Not in My Name’ by all religious communities including common Hindus also. Another matter of concern is that the Parsi community is declining day by day. Most of the Parsi writers has raised the declining community threat in their works. The work is not focusing negative criticism on any specific religion but it covers some bad events in India where minorities are often becoming the victims of crisis under which they feel sense of insecurity. Similarly, Rohinton Mistry has capture some bad events in which minorities especially Parsis and Muslims feel some sense of insecurity in a dominated culture after the demolition of Babri Mosque.

Rohinton Mistry’s matter of concern:

Parsis are the most colonized people as they migrate to different parts of world particularly America, Canada and India. Post-coloniality becomes a major theme and preoccupation in the works of the minorities especially Parsi writers like Rohinton Mistry. He depicts how Parsis interact with the rest of the populace around them whether in India, America, Britain with Canada. Post- independence Parsi writing in English is ethnocentric as Nilofer E. Bharucha points out, “The Parsis are single largest group of ethno-religious/Minority discourse practitioners amongst Indian English writers” Bharucha (2003a). Obviously, their literature is characterized by both ethnocentric and minority discourse features. It depicts all concerns of the modern day Parsis. Parsis, being the miniscule minority in India experiences ethnic anxieties. They feel insecure, experience identity crisis and feel threatened by possible submersion in the dominant Hindu culture, and a feeling of nightmare which they do not ever want to come true. Besides, the sense of insecurity and identity crisis, there are other disturbing ethnic features like declining population, low birth rate, late marriages, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, alienation, urbanization etc. All these issues find expression in the works of post-independence Parsi writer Rohinton Mistry.

There are Parsi writers whose literature is considered community specific like Rohinton Mistry in Tales from Firozsha Bagh and Such a Long Journey, Firdaus Kanga in Trying to Grow, Farrukh Dhondy in Bombay Duck and Bapsi Sidhwa in The Crow Eaters and The Pakistani Bridge. They are all sensitive to their community’s aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, Struggles for survival and identity crisis as A. K. Singh points out, “Their work exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their work though on the surface these work deal with their human protagonists”. (A. K. Singh, 1995:66).
India is a country where almost all the religions of the world found representation namely Hinduism, Islamic faith, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. While the overpowering majority of India is Hindu (79.80% of the population). Some of the other groups classified as minorities consist of Muslims (14.23%), Christians (2.30%), Sikhs (1.72%), Buddhists (0.70%), Jains (0.37%), and others (0.66%). Prominent among the latter are Parsis (69,601 in number), Bahais (11,324), and Jews (4,650). (Registrar General of India :2011).

Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India. Although they are minority in India their contribution to society, economics, commerce, science, politics and literature has been remarkable. They are small, yet united Religious community. In India, they live mostly on the West Coast of subcontinent especially in Mumbai. The Parsis are the followers of Prophet Zoroaster and their religion is known as Zoroastrianism. The original Homeland of the Parsis, an ancient Persian province is located at present in Southern Iran. In 8th A.D, they were forced to flee from their primary space 'Iran' and arrived at Sajan in Gujarat in India. They sought refuge from king Jadhav Rana and there, their priest and leader Dustur performed a symbolic action of dropping a ruby-studded gold ring into urn filled with milk and sugar which indicates their willingness, friendship and co-operation to the regions prosperity.

Mistry's novels often deal with the life of Indians who suffer from communal disharmony, religious and caste discriminations, extreme poverty, beliefs and superstitions, manners and customs, religious and ethnicity and cultural diversities. His novels also present realistic picture of the minority community of the Parsi people, it's fears, anxieties, a sense of despair, helplessness because of the political uncertainties of the period of 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s. Mistry’s first two works foreground the heterogeneity of Identity within Parsi community and dynamic nature of Parsi community itself. But his community does not figure much in his Novel A Fine Balance. There is a sincere attempt to retrieve the indigenous Parsi culture which is suppressed by the dominant cultural ideologies present in Indian society. Mistry in his novels brings forth the humiliation and unease in the lives of Parsis and the people from the lowerstrata of the society in the hands of the dominant ideologies in the society. This ideological domination further leads towards the cultural domination which denies the very heterogeneity of other cultures. He has not raise the issues of his community only but other minorities also through the crucial historical events like emergency periods, after the demolition of Babri Mosque, assassination of Indra Gandhi, Indo-Pak war, etc.

II. Religious Minorities in Family Matters

Family Matters is a novel in which Mistry has highlighted concern of minorities. Here he has not only raise the issues of Parsi minority but also the other minorities like Muslims and Christians in a dominated Hindu cultured India in the context of some historical events. Family Matters (2002) is Mistry’s eagerly anticipated third novel, following the success of his highly acclaimed A Fine Balance (1995), which won several major literary awards internationally. The novel has received accolades as his earlier works from the critics. It boldly attempts to secure a distinct space for the Parsi Zoroastrians within the dominant Indian cultural space. The focus of the Novel shifts from the 1970s and the era a emergency to 1990s. The novel expresses the oppressive situation of India and Maharashtra including the major concerns in the 1990’s, the era of the post-Babri Masjid riots, corruption and communalism. It deals with everything from the dilemmas among India's Parsi, a single-family living on the edge of the middle class in contemporary Bombay, facing the brutal social situations and living through a domestic crisis. The novel also depicts the problems of insular-marriage and Parsi social-status in post-Ayodhya India where not only Parsis but other minorities were also threatened by the increasing fundamentalism. As such, there is no protagonist in the novel; for the focus of the narrative shifts among several characters, Nariman, Yezad, Jehangir, Roxana and Hussain. In fact, it is the Parsi family and through it the geriatric community that it represents, is the protagonist. A. K. Singh who has aptly commented on the central role of the Parsi community in the novels of Mistry as:

Rohinton Mistry has demonstrated immense ability in responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community, and also to the country. He narrates his community through the different narratives of his characters who invariably express their concern for their community and the changes that will affect their community as well as themselves. Their fate is bound up with the fate of their community. By centralizing their community in their narratives, they centralize and preserve and protect themselves, and thus use it as a psychological crutch (Singh, 1996: 29).

As with his earlier short-story collection, Tales from Firozsha Baag, and novel Such a Long Journey, Mistry consciously crafts a narrative that deepens our sense of the vital life of a Parsi family. The family filled with sibling rivalries, lost loves, secrets, customs and rituals, the pains of the young along with the acute sufferings of the old and all these with the backdrop of emergency. In the novel, Mistry not only mirrored the problems of Parsi community but other minorities also. The novel examines the rich experiences adaptation to his chronic condition and the effects on those conditions to him. The novel is narrated by an omniscient narrator and takes place in 1995, two years after the Bombay riots caused due to Babri Mosque conflict. The Novel revolves around a seventy-eight-year-old Nariman Vakeel, an aged Parsi retired professor of English, lives in a spacious seven-room apartment house with his middle-aged stepchildren, Coomy and Jal Contractor. Their relationship is
not pleasant, and when he breaks his ankle they contrive a plan to send him in care of his own daughter, Roxana Chenoy. So, Nariman is transposed to the midst of a loving but burdened household on the other side of the city. Roxana lives in pleasant apartment with her husband Yezad Chenoy and their two children Murad and Jahangir. Yezad is working as a manager in Bombay sporting Emporium who has already besieged by financial worries and, therefore, naturally becomes desperate on being forced take up the new responsibility of looking after his father-in-law. This creates financial and emotional problems in Roxana’s household, because the Chenoy family live in a one-bedroom apartment and are hardly able to maintain a middle-class life style. Feeling pressured in such conditions, Yezad, who is the manager of a shop sells sports equipment, schemes to earn a bigger salary by trying to encourage the owner, Mr. Kapur, to stand for elections in order to root out corruption and defy the Shiv Sena.Yezad’s scheme has tragic cost that the Shiv Sena has killed Mr. Kapur. Coomy also dies who was not in interest for Nariman to return, deliberately damages the ceiling of her room and is accidentally killed when a beam falls on her. In the meanwhile, Yezad is powerless to bear the emotional and financial tension. Hence, he gradually turns to religion and becomes a committed Parsi. By using skillful technique, the epilogue takes place five years later and is written from Jehangir’s viewpoint. We learn that Nariman has died, the Chenoy family has shifted to Jal after Coomy’s death, and Yezad has turned into a religious militant. However, the tension continues to spread through the family when Yezad demands that Murad who is now a rebellious college student, be cautious about Zoroastrian traditions. The novel concludes with Jehangir’s disappointment at his father’s behaviour, but conscious that he has to negotiate between his responsibilities to his family and the Parsi community, and his own individual wishes.

Once again, the center of attraction in the novel is the Parsi community and hence, all the members of the family are presented. Besides these Parsi members, there are other characters also who represent other communities. Mistry not only explores his concern for his community but also contemporary ethnic and religious hostility in India attempting to give a literary representation of the importance of the burning and destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992. Aftermath of the issue of the Babri Mosque causes not only the threat of Muslims but also other minorities like Parsi community and Christians. The Shiv Sena is still shown under its religious chauvinism around the novel as Bharucha rightly points out that the old ‘bete-noir’, the Shiv Sena, is still around and its religious chauvinism has been augmented by the pan-India fanatic Hindutva of the BJP (Bharucha, 2003: 168).

Mistry sets his novel exactly in the midst of this violent and corrupt politics. He touches the Indian reality of the 1990s, and the political subtext of the novel is the growth of the fundamentalist Shiv Sena principles and its repercussions on the life of the ordinary and innocent people especially minorities. The rise of right wing political parties in India led to a moment of serious crisis for all non-Hindu Indians (minorities) and the novel tries to depict their anxieties, feelings of insecurity and fear. It is witnessed that the tyrannical extremist politics and religious chauvinism enter the novel from the very beginning when Nariman tries to convince Coomy that it is perfectly safe for him to go for a walk by pointing out that dangers prowl indoors as well as outdoors. But Coomy refers to the burning downward of an old Parsi couple by angry Hindu mobs under the ‘mistaken impression’ who believed that fleeing Muslims might have been given shelter in that building. She also points out that Bombay burnt for months after razing the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. “How often does a mosque in Ayodhya turn people into savages in Bombay? Once in a blue moon” (Mistry, 2002:5).

This novel like Such a Long Journey presents Shiv Sena as a Hindu fundamentalist involved in rioting, looting and burning the poor and the innocent people. It has brought out minority community’s grievances and remonstrations with the ‘secular’ multicultural image of the Indian polity. The demolition of the Babri Mosque was a major destructive event aimed at hurting the secular polity of India. The role of the government agencies in perpetration of atrocities against the innocent civilians of the minorities has been questioned. Mistry unobtrusively mirrored out the danger which exists not only for the Muslim community but also for the Parsis. The people helping the rioters were none other than the guardians of law, the Bombay police, who itself behaving like the gangsters. Mistry shows how the apparatus of the post-colonial national state itself becomes oppressive and perpetuates like National Imperialism. Hussain, while narrating his woeful tale, becomes an authentic voice of not only Muslim community but also of the author’s own Parsi community. It is through Yezad that we come in contact with his office peon, Hussain, a tragic victim of the post-Babri Masjid riots in which his wife and children were burnt alive. Hussain in his own words describes the tragic events against Muslim minority as:

The police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim Mohallas, they were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came out to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody! And my poor wife and children... I couldn’t even recognize them. (Mistry:148)

These fundamentalist forces used to unleash terror over people’s mind as the novelist wails over the ruthless and oppressive measures taken by these religious fanatics. They are responsible for ruining the multi-cultural and
multi-lingual peaceful co-existence of the nation like India. It speaks volumes about how a religious minority gets trampled under the sense of insecurity. Yezaţ who is hunted by Hussain’s tragedy also sums up the attitude of the Shiv Sena as: ‘South Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hindustani, Film stars born before 1947 in the Pakistani Part of Punjab are traitors to the country.’ (Mistry:32).

The fear, anxiety and the insecurity the minorities feel from the fundamentalists and fanatics like the Shiv Sena in Bombay or the Hindu fundamentalists like Bajrang Dal. The early 1970s witnessed the growth of the Shiv Sena with its demand for Maratha Raj have got expression in Such a Long Journey like Family Matters through the words of Gustad:

No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America-twice as good as the white man to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (Mistry,SLJ:55).

This statement reveals Gustad’s psychological fear and sense of insecurity about his son’s future and life. He thinks that there is no future for minorities in this country because of fascist activities like Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal who fights only for Marathi people and Marathi language. Such fascist ideology reduced them as black people in America.

As mentioned above the events, the reader gets the idea how Shiv Sena has increase their influence on many domains of activities in city and how they try to control and make a profit out of everything. They are not only who are behind the unlawful lottery ‘Matka’ but also use the profits to fund the organization. It is clearly shown that the illegal lottery also finances the organized crime which has not only contaminated the city and its institutions but also its integrity. Gautam, a journalist who raises his voice by an article against the Shiv Sena underground activities, has undergone the humiliation and threats of Shiv Sena activists as: Gustad described how a dozen of them had accosted him, screaming that journalists who malign the Shiv Sena and blackened its good name by printing lies would receive the same treatment. The men twisted his arms behind him and grabbed his hair to keep him still. They had a tin of Cherry Blossom black shoe polish, and applied it to his face and ears and neck, even ruining his shirt in the process.(Mistory:207)

The Shiv Sena has added its connections with gangsters and practiced a cultural censorship programme which causes some cultural disturbances much like Yezad’s frustration. They think that the homogeneity of the nation is threatened by cultural diversity and so they banned certain art works, men’s magazines, working of women in bars and Valentine’s Day. They listed the Muslims as enemies of the nation. Yezad noticed and said: “What a joke of a government. Clowns and crooks. Or clownish crooks. Santa Claus with mask and machine gun would be a fitting Christmas decoration for the Shiv Sena. Or any other party, for that matter.” (Mistry:273).

Though it is clear that the marginalized people run enormous risks if they refuse to obey the rules established by those in power. Not only it depicted that the Shiv Sena was involved in the savage murder of Husain’s family during the Bombay riots but Mr. Kapur himself falls victim to those representatives of the extremist forces who had tried to oppose so feebly, and it is clear that they beat up Gautam for writing “An in-depth analysis about the politician–criminal-police nexus.” (Mistry:206). Mistry not feels sorry for Mumbai for “it is being raped by politicians” (156) but also calls the Shiv Sena “the greatest urban menace” (Mistry:209).

The Shiv Sena and BJP administration, after 1995 elections, on coming to the power, introduced several measures meant to strengthen their position and advance the cause of Hindutva. Some of these actions were directly aimed at minority communities. One of the high-profile initiative among them was the renaming of Bombay as Mumbai which was measured as one of the first significant attempts to remove all non-Hindu place names from the so-called purified Hindu land. This was seen as the massive blow to its cosmopolitan citizens. In consideration of renaming of Bombay, it shows the notion of reiterative practices of naming as a construction and fixation of identities, and of the use of names claims to certain identities, and cultures. This understanding of names as signifiers of identity, culture, belonging and entitlement resonates within the ancestral home and lies beneath the differing behaviours of Coomy, Jal Yezad and Roxana towards Nariman. The decision of the people in power that influences the fate of one of the characters in the novel, namely Mr. Vikram Kapur. He denied changing the name of his shop from Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium to Mumbai Sporting Goods Emporium. The denial of Kapur which attracts the attention of the murderous Shiv Sena activists and indirectly leads to his subsequent murder. Name for him was a kind of sense of his security and indicator of his identity as the reader witnesses how he cherishes the collection of pictures of colonial Bombay which he holds in high regard. He tells Yezad “From three pictures so many memories. And this can happen with every single photo – each one conceals volumes. All you need is the right pair of eyes … to unlock the magic.” (Mistry:229)

The concern of renaming the Bombay and characters reaction against this activity is also witnessed in Mistry’s early works. For instance, mentioned in Such a long journey Dinshwanji’s reaction against the reformation of names is resembling with Mr. Kapoor. The reformation of names indicates the troublesome implications for a distinctive Parsi identity.
Besides the sense of insecurity and identity or cultural crisis, there are other disturbing ethnic features like declining population, low birth rate, late marriages, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, alienation, urbanization etc. All these issues find expression in Rohinton Mistry’s works like other the post-independence Parsi writers in English. The Parsi always feel that their community is approaching towards decline day by day and the Parsi writers express their fear through their writings so as to caution their community about their falling population. Similarly, Mistry wants to leave a record about his community for the benefit of posterity. Bharucha Quotes Mistry’s words in an interview: “…when the Parsis have disappeared from the phase of the Earth, his writings will preserve a record of how they lived, to some extent (Bharucha, 1995:59). In Family Matters too, Rohinton Mistry expresses his fear about the downfall of the community. We are witnessed when Inspector Masalawala, Jal and Dr. Fitter discuss the future of the Parsi community. They agree that the factors contributing to the downfall are “dwindling birth rate, our man and women marrying non-Parsi, and the heavy migration to the west.” (Mistry, 2002:400). Inspector Masalawala expresses his fear thus: “The experts in demographics are confident that fifty years hence, there will be no Parsis left. (Mistry:400)

He also finds fault with Parsi boys and girls for the falling of birth rate as he said:

Our Parsi boys and girls do not want to get married unless they have their own flat. Which is the next to impossible in Bombay, right? they don't want to sleep under the same roof as their Mummy and Daddy. Meanwhile, the other communities are doing it in the same room never mind the same rood, Separated by a plywood partition or a torn curtain. Our little Lords and ladies want sound proofing and privacy. These western ideas are harmful (Mistry:401)

Mistry depicts community’s disapproval of inter-community marriage one such issue and the most important one for their survival, through the tragic relationship between Nariman, the protagonist and Lucy. Forced to marry a Parsi widow namely Yasmin, Nariman still loves Lucy. He still feels sorry for Lucy who rejected by her family, now lives in YWCA. The rigidity of the Orthodox Parsis like Nariman’s father in disallowing Nariman to marry a non-Parsi girl has not made his son’s life miserable but also has far repercussions on his progeny too. Coomy nurtures bitterness for his step-father Nariman throughout her life as on a fatal day, Lucy and Yasmin, while quarrelling with each other in the Balcony fall down and die. The history starts repeating when Yezad, once a jolly-good liberal person, has become a bigot and very stringent about his religion. He agitates when he catches his son Murad kissing a non-Parsi girl and shouts in anger and continues to harangue his son, “You can have any friends you like any Race or religion, but for serious relationship, for marriage the rules are different. Because we are pure Persian race a unique contribution to this planet and mixed marriage will destroy that. (Mistry:469)

Mistry has deliberately brought into the novel the love experiences of both the grandfather and grandson with non-Parsi girls to reiterate that the Parsis can never change their convictions whatever be the whims and fancies of the individual. (Duresh, 2006: 92)

III. CONCLUSION

The novel is realistic picture of the minority communities like Muslims, Christians especially Parsis who feel fear, anxieties, threat, a sense of insecurity, helplessness because of the political uncertainties. India’s shift from egalitarianism to majoritarianism in the character of our nationalism, religious chauvinism carries, of course, particularly dangerous consequences for minorities. India as a secular state no longer aspire to transform our society, hardly attempt to examine it. All our national attention seems insidiously focused on the affairs and issues of religious minorities. It is necessary to steam out the hatred, misconceptions between different religious communities through proper channels. In such times of crisis like today’s mob lynching of Muslims and Dalits on the bases of Gua-Rakhshak, it is necessary to come in terms with reality by admitting and respecting the differences as a vital aspect of human existence and should inculcating tolerance towards other i.e. religion, cultural, national, ethnic and lingual etc.

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Abstract: The present paper attempts to explore how Adiga in his second novel Between the Assassinations (2008), depicts the journey of Indian society from aspirations to disillusionment by raising very vital issues of national importance such as caste, class and religious fanaticism through a story of ‘everyman’ of ‘every town’ of the period of transition between the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi viz. 1984 to 1991. These issues are deep-rooted in our psyche and are resistant to change. Though exiled by centuries of India’s rigid caste, class and religious pride, thrust into the dismal outskirts of society, Adiga’s characters who are victim of this system somehow feel an immense connectedness to realities, a passion for the subtleties in the world around them, and they long for a dignity which they may never know. The paper is a scathing critique of the individual vices such as hypocrisy, avarice and false pride in one’s social status based on caste, class, religion and wealth which are working together for disintegration of human values and society as a whole.

Keywords: Caste System, Class System, Minority, Communal Disharmony.

Aravind Adiga the author of the novel Between the Assassinations exposes the gritty realities of an India entrenched in transition and turmoil between the years 1984 and 1991 through a series of open-ended short stories. It is the time when Indira Gandhi and his son were assassinated. This novel is set in ‘Kittur’ a fictional town on India’s South-Eastern Coast, in between Goa and Calicut where Adiga introduces the reader to a world of corruption and chaos, of DDT and Hinduism, of limbless beggars and staggering riches—and the characters who must either succumb to or surpass their volatile surroundings. There was communal violence throughout India at this time. In the midst of this erratic and tumultuous time period, the underprivileged masses were overwhelmingly cast out, left to their own devices. As being the products of a culture riddled with conflicting values and a history consumed by judgment and class confinement, these devices weren’t by any means very honorable. Still, even in these bleakest of circumstances, Adiga hints at glimpses of hope, determination, and strength in the human spirit. So, the present paper attempts to explore how Adiga in his second novel Between the Assassinations (2008), depicts the journey of Indian society from aspirations to disillusionment by raising very vital issues of national importance such as caste class and religious fanaticism through a story of ‘everyman’ of ‘every town’ of the period of transition between the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi viz. 1984 to 1991

Caste System has been India’s most grave societal evil since centuries ago. Caste discrimination and repression is mostly found to be in practice among the Hindus of India. In India, the caste in which one is born leaves a permanent imprint on the person. These ideas are deep-rooted in our psyche and are resistant to change. There are deep caste-based divisions in India as Arundhati Roy writes:

“Deep at the heart of the horror of what’s going on lies the caste system: this layered, horizontally divided society with no …human – humane- interaction that holds the layers together. So when the bottom half of society simply shears off and falls away, it happens silently.( Roy 2011:6)

Though exiled by centuries of India’s rigid caste system and thrust into the dismal outskirts of society, Adiga’s characters who are victim of this system somehow feel an immense connectedness to realities, a passion for the subtleties in the world around them, and they long for a dignity which they may never know.
While they are doomed to the cyclical nature of the lingering caste system and is discarded and scrutinized by those who are above him, it becomes apparent that Xerox can see the world and feel his surroundings in a way no one else can. Through unrivaled empathy, Xerox are able to rise above the rich in the one way he know how. Ramkrishna, a Dalit bookseller known as ‘Xerox’ who has been arrested twenty-one times in a nine year span for selling pirated copies of books at discounted rates. He sells the books not only for survival but also for the prestige of the vocation that is why he once told inspector Ramesh, “...I just love books: I love making them, holding them and telling them. My father took out crap for a living, sir; he couldn’t even read or write. He’d be so proud if he could see that I made my living from books” (Aravind Adiga 2008:46). After unknowingly selling copies of a book banned in the Republic of India, The Satanic Verses, Xerox finds himself confined in a torturous prison. The policemen are entertained by Xerox telling smutty tales of some college girls whom he saw wearing jeans in American style. Xerox, being a low caste, narrates the story of what his father did all his life for a living-taking the crap out of the houses of rich landlords which was traditional occupation of people of his caste. His old father would have hang all day long around the black wall of the landlord's house, waiting for the smell of human faces. As soon as he smelled that smell, he has to come close to the house, and wait with bent knees like a wicket keeper waits for the ball in cricket. Then hearing the sound of the boom-box closing, he has to run to the well, pull out the retractable potty through a hole in the wall, empty it into the rose-plants, wipe it clean with his loincloth and insert it back into the wall before the next person will use the toilet. While he sleeps, the police station upper caste inspector, Ramesh, and lawyer, D’Souza, gulp down bottles of Old Monk while grudgingly observing Xerox’s sleeping frame and remarks as:

That fucking son of an untouchable. See him snoring.’
‘His father took out crap- this fellow thinks he’s going to dump crap on us!’
Selling The Satanic Verses .He'll sell it under my nose, will he?”

These people think they own India now. Don’t they? they want all the jobs and all the degrees at university, and all the…” (p.49)

Within few seconds, both the upper caste men take pleasure in breaking his legs. The policeman and the lawyer took turns: they smashed the bar against Xerox’s legs just at the knee joint, “like the monkey god did on TV,”(p.49). Once out of the hospital and upon his release Xerox openly defies the police and plans to sell only one book banned throughout the Republic of India- The Satanic, he confronts the policeman, grinning, “You can break my legs but I can’t stop selling books. I’m destined to do this, sir” (p.50). For the policeman and the lawyer who torture Xerox is not just a petty thief but a symbol of the oppressed that have begun to assert themselves and challenge the powerful. Dr. Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam states as:

While the obsolete system of reservations and the discontent of the Inspector may well be a prelude to the Mandal agitation of the 1990s, Xerox’s open rebellion shows that the Dalit too will no longer take insults lying down. His act of defiance challenges the Indian State which has failed to establish true equality. Adiga underlines the fact that unless social attitudes change, no amount of quotas will lend dignity to the downtrodden”(Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam 2011:226-229)

The caste, in India, which one is born, gives him an identity in the society and it may be an identity of pride or humiliation. The caste gives an individual a sense of belonging, even if a lower caste person becomes rich but still he is treated with humiliation rather than nobility. Adiga has captured this through the case of Shankara, who is, a child born from the union of a Brahmin father and a low caste Hoyka woman. Shankara belongs to a lower caste Hoyka community suspects that the teachers must be mocking behind his back. He feels insecurity about his identity and against the caste biased society in which he thinks and experienced humiliation for being half-caste, tries to take revenge by exploding a bomb in his school. He thinks that he has “burst a bomb to end the 5,000 year-old caste system that still operates in our country. I have burst a bomb to show that a man should not be judged, as I have been merely by the accident of his birth” (Aravind Adiga 2008:59)

As by exploding bomb, he dreams that he would be treated in a different way in jail, as a martyr of some kind. The Hoyka self advancement committee would take out marches for him, and the police would not dare touch
him. Perhaps, when he would be released, great crowds would wave for him; he would be launched on a political career. As Shankara a union of Brahmin-Hoyka is presently by adiga differently:

Shankara was always treated as someone special among his Hoyka relatives; because he was half Brahmin, and hence so much higher than them in the class seal. Swearing to himself, he kept going up the stairs. Didn’t these Hoykas understand? There was nothing he hated more than their groveling to him, because of his half Brahmin. If they had been contemptuous of him, if they had forced him to crawl into their shops to expiate the sin of being a half-Brahmin, then wouldn’t he have come to see them every day? (p.62).

Social isolation and sense of humiliation in caste-based society makes the boy more violent. He even hates his driver who belongs to an upper caste. The Brahmin relatives see him as the product of a daring adventure on the part of his father and consider him as a mixture of premarital sex and caste violation. As Staying away from his father for six years, Shankara has developed a feeling that his father belonged to no caste or race; such people lived for themselves. His mother being Hoyka feels herself inferior in the company of the Brahmin relatives. As she told that:

She did not want to meet the Brahmin woman alone. Her sole claim to acceptance, to respectability, was the production of a male child, an heir- and if he wasn't in the house, then she had nothing to show. She was just a Hoyka trespassing into a Brahmin's household (p.61).

Shankara thinks that it is her own fault if she feels distressed among Brahmin relatives. Repeatedly, he tells his mother to ignore the Brahmin relatives as her “don’t humiliate yourself once more in front of them. If they don’t want us, let us not want them.”(p.61)

Adiga through the dilemma of Shankara raises a question whether caste or class is worst in society. Shankara though rich is not given recognition by the upper caste. Although he is the son of a Brahmin, he is never considered a Brahmin. However, his driver who belongs to upper caste, is poor. The old Brahmin who shows sympathy to him cannot afford a car for travelling; however, Shankara has ample wealth (Nikam, 2011: p.140). Shankara contemplates:

He is of a caste higher than me, but he is poor. What does this mean, caste? Is it just said to yourself? Caste is a fiction, would it vanish like smoke; if you said, ‘I am free’, would you realize you had always been free?”(Aravind Adiga 2008:69)

Adiga seems to suggest that the caste discrimination has created some groups like Naxalities or other which is the threat itself as Shankara poses a question to the professor “what do we do about the caste system, sir? How do we get rid of it?”(75) Professor replies, “one solution is what the Naxalites have done, just to blow up the upper castes entirely”(p.73)

In another story “Valencia: To The First Crossroad” the Hindu cast system is presented in another interesting angle. There is a character Jayamma, who works as a cook, although belonging to Brahmin caste, she has to suffer from the ceaseless misery. Jayamma is one of the eleven children and her father being a floor cannot afford the expenses of his eight daughters. Her father is able to save the gold only for six daughters to be married off. The last three has to stay barren virgin for life. Jayamma Hindu Brahmin woman is made to work from her early years as a maid servant in one family after another, some of them as also their other servants being Hoykas upon whom she looks down and grumbles at her fate. Working at the advocate’s house, she hates another servant-girl Shaila for belonging to lower caste. She refuses to share a room with Shaila in the servant's quarters even though she prefers to stay in the room of seven feet by seven feet with a little space in between the shrine and the rice bags, just enough to curl up and go to sleep at night. She believes in karma and wiped her forehead, and went on to ask “ what had she done in a previous life- had she been a murderess, an adulterous, a child devourer, a person who was rude to holy men and sages to have been fated to come here, to the advocate's house, and live next to a lower caste?” (p.160).The upper caste depravity was in such a limit that they think that only they are meant for to read and write as it is when the advocate teaches Shaila to read and write, Jayamma feels that he is violating the rules of caste system: “Were the lower castes meant to read and write?”(p.165)

Aravind Adiga exposes another vital issue like communal disharmony which causes hatred among different communities. Since from post-independence of India, it has been seen that whenever there causes untoward,
minorities always suffered and subjugated. There is galaxy of characters represent each section of our society. Among them, Ziauddin, a Muslim boy, twelve year old sixth of the eleventh children of a farm labouring family, works in a tea stall through which adiga highlights how the Muslims are discriminated, and are not considered the part of the mainstream society. Zia working in an age in which he should reap the joy of innocent childhood, he develops a sense of isolation from the society. He has left entirely to his own wits and has to struggle for survival like an adult. In the town of Kittur, Muslims are marginalized from the mainstream social discourse. None of the Hindu shopkeepers near the railway station hire a Muslim worker but Ramanna Shetty employs Ziauddin due to his innocence, as it is clear that Muslims are being marginalized when Ramanna Shetty placed a hand on Zia’s head put his words to the Thimma “which, i can tell u , aren’t much, even for a Muslim!”(p.5). After a stay for four months with his parents, the boy comes back completely transformed, losing his innocence. He develops a sense of pride in his religion and takes a keen interest in knowing his ancestral roots. However, the honest boy changes as a thief stealing small things which leads to his removal from work after another. While fighting, he always asserts his identity as a Pathan, slapping his chest, “From the land of the Pathans, far off the north, where there are mountains full of snow! I’m not a Hindu! I don’t do hanky-panky!”(p.8) The religious pride and a sense of separation spreads poison in the mind of the little fellow because of Muslims feel insecure after the tragic events of riots. These years witnessed the anti-Sikh and Babri-Ayodhya riots that shook the very soul of a nation. Though riots had been occurring ever since Partition, 1984-1991 was the time during which religious fundamentalists, especially Hindu communalists, whipped up religious passions and sentiments to a new frenzy and the secular fabric of the nation seemed to be in real danger. We see a slackening of the nation’s long vigil against communal forces. Infact during the 1990s the BJP had launched a campaign to hoist the national flag at Idgah Maidan in Kittur, near Hubli.(Dr.Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam 2011:226-229)

A feeling of insecurity makes him hate the Hindus with whom he had spent happy moments of life. It is clear that he has been brain washed by some religious extremists as they have developed this by impact of these tragic events which cause this sense communalism and sense of insecurity that makes the young boy hate the others. He shouts when he is beaten by Ramanna “I am a Pathan! … We came here and built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi and so don’t you dare treate me like this....”(Aravid Adiga 2008:9 ).In turn, Ramanna put his words towards the ring of customers “there is no work here for a Muslim and he has to fight with the one who gives him a job”(p.9).Ziauddin's quest for identity increases when he comes in contact with a north Indian Muslim Pathan, with whom he develops a sense of belonging, and the stranger's expensive cloths, handsome face and the scent make him take a pride in his acquaintance as he feels “this man is a countryman of mine” (p.15). The stranger tempts Ziauddin to count the number of trains with Indian soldiers, which leads to some terrorist activity. Appealing to his Muslim Pathan identity, the stranger tries to get the work done but Zia realizes that he is being used by the self-centered terrorist and escapes from his clutches and leads a normal life as a coolie at the railway station. The novelist through Zia's story tries to highlight the problems of minorities and probe into the causes behind terrorism.

One may be born poor, even if a poor man works hard and wants to rise up in life it does not mean that he will be accepted by the upper class society as an equal. but he does everything to rise upwards. George, the mosquito-man who spreads the pesticides tries to win the heart of a rich lady Mrs.Gomes but realizes that he will always be treated as a poor. As a he realizes and put his words to friends, “you know what the biggest difference is, between being rich and being like us? The rich can make mistakes again and again. We make only one mistake, and that's it for us” (p.186). His friend Vijay with a sigh that is half rebellion and half acceptance the fact says, “the rich own the whole world”(p.185). The aspiration of poor people are not only to get money but to struggle for respect and social status even though they have lower job as once George is annoyed by rich woman’s tone who he thinks his princes. She frowned, “how much do you want to do this?(p.190 ).He says nothing but thought, “how the rich think they can buy us like cattle!(p.190).It is clear when he conversates with his friends at construction site when he shows his psyche or feelings against riches and says , “the rich abuse us ,man. It’s always here, take twenty rupees, kiss my feet. Get into the gutter. Clean my shit. It’s always like that” (p.194).Gradually, George wins her confidence and becomes part-time gardener, and then driver. He manages to bring his sister, Maria, in Mrs. Gomes house as a cook. He perceives
that Mrs. Gomes is different from other rich people and successively she senses that he is slowly trying to take over her household. The cook who is dismissed from her job to make way for George’s sister Maria says: “I know what you are trying to do with her! I told her you’ll destroy her name and reputation! But she’s fallen under your spell” (p.205). George hopes Maria can get married soon as she has a status as a cook in a rich woman’s house. Due to bitterness, poverty and shame he had put off the thought of his marriage so long but “the regret still gnawed at him, created by his contact with this rich woman, that he could have done so much more with his life” (p.206-207). He develops the thought to be treated with nobility and dignity by her. But his delusion soon shattered when he is asked by her to spread the pesticides in the gutter in the same manner as in the past. He is offended to know that she still treats him like a servant. He understands, “Oh, these rich people are the same … We’re just trash to them. They’ll just use us and throw us out. A rich woman can never see a poor man as a man. Just as a servant” (p.208). Mrs.Gomes knows that her reputation is at stake, she removes him and his sister from the work.

In the novel Between the Assassinations Adiga has very finely narrated the stories of ‘everyman’ in an ‘every town’ in a local flavor which gives an universal appeal to the realistic treatment of the characters. It is rightly said; Adiga invites reader's attention towards the disparities between the poor and the rich, communal disharmony, corruption, violence and hypocrisy” (Nikam & Nikam 2012:145). He raises the voices of subaltern who are eager to change their fate and destiny. Adiga deeply presents the pathetic condition of underdogs as well as what compels them to commit crimes, to rob people, to kill people, and to force the people to choose a wrong path. The novel is a muffled voice of protest and has vocalized them creatively so that people of the entire world may know that ‘all is not right in the world’. By projecting myriad pictures of society and people of India, Adiga displays his full-range of imagination, impressive and genuine concern for those who are victims of caste, class, communal disharmony and poverty.

WORKS CITED

Other Indian voices, Bapsi Sidhwa, Khushwant Singh, and Rohinton Mistry ‘speak history’ as their novels carry the weight of conveying an often-absent official history of Partition and the Emergency, history verified by Partition survivor interviews. In Such a Long Journey, Mistry uses an anthrozoological theme in portraying issues of power over innocence. The most recent Indian winner (2008) was Aravind Adiga for his novel The White Tiger. For example, although the primary discussion of Arundhati Roy’s novel The God of Small Things will be an identification of Roy ‘singing’ abjection, it is obvious that Roy also uses magic realism when the child Sophie Mol does a cartwheel in her coffin (8). Subaltern is a term used to refer to the suppressed or silenced lower class.