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on

Mainstreaming the Marginalized:
Perspectives in Humanities, Commerce and Science



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Mainstreaming the Marginalized: Perspectives in Humanities, Commerce and Science

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CONTENTS

1. Voices of the Marginalized in the Plays of Girish Karnad / Dr R. T. Bedre | 11
2. Cultural Estrangement and Reality in Literature / Dr. Bhagyashree S. Gawate | 16
3. *The Colour Consciousness In Die Nigger Diel* / Desai M. S. | 21
4. Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives / Dr. S.A.R.Abidi & Kempaanna Rachappa Donawad | 27
5. Resisting Marginalization: Caste Reality and Social Policy in the Indian Society. A Cosmopolitan Perspective / Dr.Grishma Khobragade | 33
6. Dalit Literature: Voices from the Margin / Dr. Madhav Hande | 40
7. Militancy and its Impact on *Purdah* System in Kashmir / Harpreet Kour | 43
8. Folk tales, Stories and Fables of Tibet: Recreating Past and Ancient Culture / Dr.Subhra Rajput | 49
9. Comparative Literature, Translation and its Relevance in Contemporary Age: A Study. / Pranami Bania | 54
10. Problems of Effective Oral Presentation for Bangladeshi Learners / S. M. Wahiduzzaman | 58
11. Mainstreaming The Marginalised: Perspectives In Humanities, Commerce And Science / Ms. Suma Priyadarshini.B.K. | 64
12. Process of Colonization and European Education Policy In Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* / Dr. Shamrao J. Waghmare | 67
13. The Reflection of Ambedkarite Movement in Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* / Dr. Arun Jadhav | 71
14. Insightful Vision as a Mode of Self-realization in the Life and Works of APJ Abdul Kalam / Dr. Shweta Sood | 75
15. Glimpses of Globalization-in Amit Chaudhari's "A Strange and Sublime Address" / Archana P. Pandit | 82
16. Issues of Gender Equality in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* / Mr.Rameshwar S. Solanke | 89
17. Minority Discourse through the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry / Mr.R.S.Gore & Dr.V.D. Satpute | 93

ways in which our own stereotypes and gender roles stop one's growth and limits the potential. For Grete, the process of maturation requires her brother to be a bug. She has no other option, but to grow up. Pointing out the consequences of gender specific roles and gender inequality, Kafka seeks to promote the reader to challenge their own limitations and obstacles to strive to become a beautiful butterfly.

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Minority Discourse through the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry

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The Central Govt. of India has been declared regulatory and developmental programmes for the minority religious communities in India which include Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhist, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains notified as minority communities in India as notified by GOI in Gazette under section 2(c) at the natural. Minority is a group of people who have been marginal from the mainstream of the society and they wish to occupy central position. There are number of factors which are responsible to consider the group of people as minority like social, economic, political and racial or gender based etc. The Indian English Literature can be divided into four distinct heads of postcolonial discourse as minority discourse, diasporic discourse, feminist discourse and political discourse, among these discourses; among these discourses the minority discourse is primary. The novel form belongs to masses, especially to the middle class milieu and it appeals to the masses not classes. The portrait of the layman was in the periphery and the richman was in the centre. Minorities like Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhist, Parsis and Jains in India feel odd with the majority people of the society. The post modern period is also marked by the emergence of minority writers on the literary voyage and these minority writers like Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mahsweta Devi, Toni Morrison, Shanta Gokhale, Beatrice Culleton, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jayanta Mahapatra, Manju Kapur, Rohinton Mistry, Khaled Hosseini and Mallikarjun Patil reveals the hopes, aspirations, fears and anxieties of their community in their fictional creations. Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Farukh Dhondy, Dina Mehta, K.N.Daruwalla, Gieve Patel and Rohinton Mistry represent the Parsi community as a minority through their literary creations.

Rohinton Mistry has emerged as a significant literary figure during the 20th century. He is one of the prominent writers of minority discourse, being a Parsi his fiction is not far from his community and religion. Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (a collection of short stories), *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* are the appropriate examples of his minority discourse. The hero of his short stories and novels belong to his Parsi community and represent the voice of minority through his fictional works. The Parsis are ethno-religious minority in India. Although they are minority in India but



their contribution to the society, economics, commerce, science, politics and literature has been remarkable, Parsis are small yet united religious community. In India, the Parsis live mostly on the west coast of subcontinent, especially in Mumbai and in Pakistan, most Parsis dwell in Karachi and Lahore. The Parsis are the followers of Prophet Zoroaster and their religion is known as Zoroastrianism. The Gathas are devotional songs composed in intricate verse by Zarathushtra or Zoroaster as the Greeks named him, Prophet of ancient Iran. Zarathushtra or Zoroaster is believed to be the first in human history to have founded a religion based on the ethical values of Truth and Justice named Asha (Vedic Rta) in the Gathas. He preached one Supreme God, Ahura Mazda, Lord of life and Wisdom, to be worshipped in thought, word and deed for the protection and evolution of Man and Nature. His followers are called Zoroastrians in the West and Zartoshtis in the East. These include the Parsis of India and Zartoshtis of Iran. Zoroaster's words exerted a profound influence on Western thought because of the interest Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras showed in his ideas. The original homeland of the Parsis, "Pars" or "Fars" an ancient province is located at present in Southern Iran. In seventh century A.D., the Parsis 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 in the eighth century.

It is claimed that Zoroastrianism flourished as the state religion of three Iranian empires of Achaemenians (549-330), the Parthians (248 BC-224AD) and Sassanians (224-652AD). The invasion of Alexander, the Great, and the rule of the Seleucids led to the persecution of Zoroastrians over the period 330-250 BC. Under the Sassanians rule founded in AD 225 Zoroastrianism recovered to become the state religion and endured until the Muslim conquest 400 years later. The Arabs conquered Iran and the Persian Empire fell under their control in the 7th century AD, they gradually imposed their religion of Islam on their subjects. They eventually arrived along the Gujarat coastline in 936AD at a place they named Sanjan, 180 kms north of Bombay. There they flourished and came to be known as the Parsis, named after Fars, the region from where they came to India.

Today it is estimated that the Zoroastrian community consists of about 1,30,000 individuals, who live in India, Iran, Pakistan, U.K., U.S.A., Canada and many parts of the English speaking world. According to a recent survey done by NDTV.Com, there are about 69,601 Parsis living in India. The rate at which their number is declining, they may soon be reduced to the status of tribe, as this number is likely to drop down to about 20,000 in the next twenty years. The Parsis arrived at India in 766 AD. India was preferred by them for

many grounds. First of all it was geographically close and it had cultural and commercial fastening with Iran. However the population of the Parsi community is dwindling fast, it is dying community. The community is fast diminishing because of low rate of birth, higher rate of death, late marriages and interfaith marriages of Parsi girls. During the British rule, the Parsis shifted to Bombay from rural Gujarat. For them Bombay was the place where they could have greater opportunities for their all round development. Thus, the Parsis have contributed to the all round development of India in general and to shape India's growth in the field of industry, science, technology, art, music, creative writing and culture in particular. As far as patriotism of the Parsi community is concerned, Nani A. Palkhiwala quotes Dadabhai Naoroji in his book, *We, The Nation: The Last Decades*:

Whether I am a Hindu, a Mohemedan, a Parsi, a Christian or any other creed. I am above all an Indian. Our country is India, our nationally is Indian. (P.11)

These words of Dadabhai Naoroji throw light on the deep-rooted patriotic spirit of great Parsi leader of Dadabhai Naoroji's calibre. The Parsis have enriched the Indian cultural heritage in their own way by setting a wonderful example how foreigners turn out to be deep-rooted natives in a country like ours. There are so many Parsi writers like Rohinton Mistry, Bapsi Sidhwa, Firdaus Kanga, Farukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Perin Bharucha, Dina Mehta, Gieve Patel, K.N. Daruwalla and many others. Rohinton Mistry's discourse does revolve around the detailing of Parsi identity. It also reveals how Parsis are learning to cope with the reality of postcolonial India and how they are coming to terms with their new lives in the west. As a Parsis he is on the periphery even in India, so his discourse also challenges and resists the totalization of the dominant culture within India itself. Mistry has also experimented with linguistic hybridity and celebrated the unique Parsi idiom in his writing.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, Mistry presents his readers with ghetto-like Parsi world, where the postcolonial Indian reality is firmly shut out and where the residents display a siege-mentality. In these short stories, Mistry grapples with what he has called identity forming elements of Parsiness-the Zoroastrian faith, a shared history of flight from Iran and refuge in India. In this insular world, the protagonist's lives revolve around the Parsi housing complex of Firozsha Baag, the Zoroastrian religion, the fire-temple, the Parsi priests, the Parsi calendar, and Parsi cuisine. This discourse also highlights Parsi idiosyncrasies and bloody mindedness. Among Indians, Parsis have a not undeserved reputation for eccentricity and testiness. This was

tolerated in colonial India, where thanks to their proximity to the colonizers, the Parsis had a certain license and were almost treated like honorary *sahibs*. However, in post-colonial India the Parsis have to contend with a downgraded status and there is little sympathy for their fads and foibles and above all their haughtiness vis a vis other Indians.

The first story of Mistry's *Tale from Firozsha Baag* is 'Auspicious Occasion'. Here the Bawaji (an affectionate/pejorative term for a Parsi male), Rustomji, is an eccentric and bloody minded much praying and agiary-going. India is firmly kept out of their Parsi world and only contact they have with non-Parsis is through their servants. In fact, both Rustomji and Mehroo are almost stereotypical Parsis and what saves them and the story from becoming banal is Mistry's deft introduction of two incidents-one where Rustomji is spat upon the paan- chewer and the second where Mehroo is shocked by the murder of the Parsi Priest, the dastoorji. These events clearly indicate the sense of unease Parsis experience in postcolonial India. Rustomji's elite-consciousness suffers a severe denting when a ghaati lets loose a steam of paan-spittle on him, soiling his crisp white coat, the dagli. Rustomji takes it as a personal slight and self-esteem is further damaged when instead of being intimidated by his ravings and rantings, the ghaatis get together and almost beat him up. He escapes only by playing the clown:- " his desperate search for a way out was rewarded-a sudden inspiration which just might work. He reached his fingers into his mouth, dislodged the dentures and spat them out onto his palm...The collapsed mouth and flapping lips appeased everyone. A general tittering spread through the assembly. Rustomji the clown was triumphant." (TIFB-18). This is a sad but true reflection of how Parsi image has been downgraded in decolonized India. At another level, his wife Mehroo is confronted with the disintegration of yet another aspect of Parsi identity, its essential sameness. She is shocked that the Parsi priest has been murdered by his own Parsi servant. This threatens the support-system, the closing of ranks syndrome, which has helped preserve the Parsi identity for over a thousand years even in the all embracing, all-encompassing ethos of Hinduism. The alienation from postcolonial India has pushed more and more Parsis into a Western Diaspora. This is evident in the story 'Lend Me Your Light' what is importance here is the feeling of guilt connected with this voluntary exodus. The enforced Diaspora from Iran had engendered a feeling of self-system, as the Parsis had gone into exile to preserve their religion and their way of life. The protagonist of the story says, " I'm guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth and paying the price in burnt our eyes: I Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto." (TFFB-180). This

story also presents the Parsis who have totally identified themselves with postcolonial India. Such Parsis are in a minority and generally frowned upon by their co-religionists. The last story in this collection, "Swimming Lesson" is the only one set fully in Canada. However, even here the Canadian world is juxtaposed with Indian memories. The distinctness of Parsi identity here is not overtly invoked but this does not necessarily mean Canada is now home. The initial failure of the protagonist to master the Chowpatty waters in Bombay, as well as the swimming pool water in Canada, symbolizes his failure to assimilate in either society.

There are a few novelists like Rohinton Mistry whose works centralize their community. This is especially true of immigrant writers from the minority communities. For instance in M.G.Vassanji's novels *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* it is the odyssey of his Khoja community in particular and that of Asian Community in general. Firdaus Kanga in his *Trying to Grow*, Farrukh Dhondy in *Bombay Duck*, Bapsi Sidhwa in *The Crow Eaters* and *An American Brat* reflect Parsi Community in diverse hues. Like other Parsi writes Mistry is sensitive to the various anxieties felt by their community. He has demonstrated this by responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community in particular and also country in general. He represents his community through different narratives of his characters who invariably express their concern for their community and the changes that affect them. By centralizing their community in their narratives, they preserve and protect themselves and thus they throw light on the existing facts. A.K. Singh aptly puts it:

Mistry's novel, as a cluster of narratives, deals with the Parsi community and its identity, with its national consciousness and then with the third dimension, too, viz. its identity with the world and the novel is to be studied in this context, if we wish to know the Parsi community as perceived by the novelist. The novel, *Such a Long Journey* traces the history of the Parsi community in India through Malcolm Saldana's bid to establish historical superiority of his religion over his friend's (Gustad's) as his Christianity came to India. Over 1900 years ago when Apostle Thomas landed on Malabar Coast long before the Parsis came to the seventh century from Persia, running away from the Muslims. But Saldhana is forced to give up by Gustad's rejoinder when he said, "this may be but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your son of God was even born;



a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam? (P. 44)

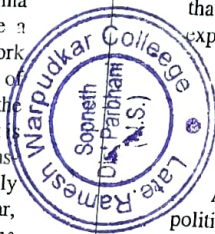
The concern of Parsi community figures prominently in *Such a Long Journey*. The inhabitants of Khodadad Buildings are representative of a cross-section of middle class Parsis expressing all the angularities of the dwindling community. The novel also focuses on some customs and rituals of the Parsi community. Indira Gandhi's bold decision to nationalize the banks affects the lives of the Parsis because they were the kings in banking. The Parsis also feels a sense of insecurity because of growing fundamentalism in Mumbai. Thus, the characters like Dilnavaz and Dinshawji suspect the natural death of Feroze Gandhi the member of their community. This is how Parsi men and women express their feeling of insecurity in *Such a Long Journey*. As a matter of fact the Parsis were absolutely safe during the Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rule in India. The emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in India affects the lives of Parsi living in India. *A Fine Balance* opens with a chapter entitled 'Prologue 1975' and ends with 'Epilogue 1984'. The novel gives grisly details of the infamous Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1977 and life in the slums of the metropolis including castration of Omprakash and death of Monkey man. *A Fine Balance* is also the story of the heroic struggle of Dina Dalal belongs to Parsi community and her two tailors to survive a world of segregation, oppression and corruption in which honest work is denied and punished by a totalitarian system. In the first chapter of the novel, we can find the discussion among the characters about the Internal Emergency imposed by the Govt. Ishvar asks: 'Dinabai what is this emergency we hear about?' Dinabai replied "Government problems, games played by the people in the power" (AFB-88). Mistry tactfully portrays the victimization of four major characters Dina Dalal, Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck Kohlah at the time of Emergency. *A Fine Balance*, like *Such a Long Journey* is thus anchored in the post independent and more specifically in the days of Indira Gandhi rule with Dina Dalal and other characters who suffer a lot because of political disturbances around them. Mistry also uses the flashback technique to co-ordinate different events scattered here and there in the epic novel. In the post modernism, the woman like Dina Dalal who fight against all odds comes in her lives and faced them independently in patriarchal society.

Family Matters is Rohinton Mistry's eagerly anticipated third novel, following the success of his highly acclaimed *A Fine Balance*. The discourse of the novel starts with the conversation of Nariman

Vakcel is a 79 years old Parsi widower and the patriarch of a small discordant family. Beset by Parkinson's disease and haunted by memories of the past, he lives in a once-elegant apartment with his two middle aged stepchildren-Coomy and her brother Jal. When Nariman's illness is compounded by a broken ankle, Coomy plots to turn his round the clock care over to Roxana, her sweet tempered sister. She succeeds, but not without cost, and eventually Nariman takes up residence with Roxana, her husband, Yezad, who is already besieged by financial worries, pushes him into a scheme of deception involving Vikram Kapur, his eccentric, often exasperating employer at Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium. Rohinton Mistry in his novel *Family Matters* confines himself only to the Parsi community that he knows so well and can therefore portray authentically. He has portrayed the life of a middle class Parsi family of Bombay. The focus of the novel has shifted from the 1970s and the years of the Emergency to the more recent times. The political party like Shiv Sena around the novel and also expose the chaos of post Babri Masjid Bombay and the minority like Parsis, Muslims and Jains feel insecure during anarchy of people in the power. The characters like Coomy represents the Parsi community and points out the dangers lurking indoors and outdoors. Here she talks about the burning down of an old Parsi couple by rioting Hindu mobs, under the mistaken impression that fleeing Muslims had been given shelter in that building. Coomy also talks about the danger that not just Parsi but also the senior citizens of Bombay are experiencing and also killed for the monetary gains. Jal says:

Just last week in Firozsha Baag an old lady was beaten and robbed inside her own flat. Poor thing is barely changing to life of at Parsi General. (FM-5)

Apart from *A Fine Balance*, this novel does not deal with the political issues but also the characters belong to Parsi community like Husain become the victims of Post-Babri Bombay riots. Shiv Sena involved in looting and burning the poor and innocent people. According to the Parsi, India is a corrupt condition of India in the following lines: "Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks" (FM-30). The protagonist of the novel Nariman is the embodiment of Parsi community. In his young age, he suffered from mental agony as his parents were against his will to marry non-Parsi girl, Lucy. On the contrary he had to marry a Parsi widow. But he could not forget his lady love in his old age and this led him to a miserable life until his death. We can also interpret the life of Nariman Vakeel as the rise and fall of Parsi community. The death of Nariman Vakeel symbolizes the



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I Meaning of the term 'Cultural Studies'

According to cultural critic Raymond Williams, *It is hard to define cultural studies mostly because the word "culture" is notoriously hard to pin down.*

Unlike most of other approaches, cultural studies is not really a discrete approach at all, but rather a set of practices. As Patric Brantlinger points out, a cultural study is not a tightly coherent group of tendencies, issues and questions. Arising amidst the turmoil's of the 1960s, cultural studies is composed of elements of Marxism, new historicism, feminism, gender studies, anthropology, studies of race and ethnicity film theory, sociology, urban studies, public policy studies, popular culture studies and post colonial studies; those fields that focus on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation. Cultural studies involves scrutinizing a cultural phenomenon. It is not about literature or even 'art'. But it shares generally four goals:-

- 1) Cultural studies transcends the confines of a particular discipline such as literary criticism or history.

The intellectual promise of cultural studies lies in its attempts to 'cut across diverse social and political interests and address many of the struggles within the current scene.' This fact is emphasized in their introduction to 'cultural studies' by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Freichler.

- 2) Cultural studies are politically engaged. Cultural critics see themselves as "oppositional", to the power structures of society; they question inequalities within power structures, including the classroom and seek to restructure relationship among the dominant and subordinated cultures.
- 3) Cultural studies deny the separation of "high" and "low" or elite and popular culture.

All forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices. Cultural studies are committed to

Mistry has an amazing way of setting up tragedy, then illuminating them with tragedy. He writes simply but by accumulating characters existence, he creates a visceral feeling and little victories. Mistry has once again its idiosyncrasies and peculiarities is full appeal as it is rich in human texture. The Mistry reveals the discourse of Minorities community; through this discourse, hopes, aspiration and struggle of the

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