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Representation of Women Characters in *Such a Long Journey*

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Introduction:

The movements for the rights of women which later on became the movement of feminism, with its numerous sub-branches in the areas such as political, ideological, and social, endeavours to define, establish, and advocate gender equality. The movement also attempts to achieve equal opportunities for women to avail education and freedom to work and above all freedom to acquire social space as much as it is given to men. In the western world, a number of movements and campaigns have been undertaken for achieving the aforesaid objectives of feminism. There are a number of feminist activists who still continue to promote the issues of women. The feminists also lead the campaigns for the rights of women that includes the right to vote, right to avail an office in public, right to work and earn to name a few. With the advent of Virginia Woolf's call for 'room of one's own', the conscious attempts to promote women's writing in creative fields commenced. The representation of women authors in creative fiddles has increased remarkably during the second half of the 20th century. It is interesting to note that there were many male authors also who represented the issues of women. Further, there are authors who have not dealt with women's issues directly in their works of fiction; nevertheless, there can be seen representation of life and condition of women of a section of society.

Rohinton Mistry is one such spokesperson novelist who represents not only his community with microscopic details and precision but also the condition of women in their time. His novels focus on the socio-cultural issues of the Parsi Community. Parsi Community is in minority in India and yet has played a significant role in shaping the pre and post-industrialization, globalization and liberalization. Rohinton Mistry's novels deal with the struggles and achievements, strength and weaknesses, ups and downs of the Parsi Community in India. Thus, Mistry's novels fairly represent all the aspects of the Parsi Community. However, his works do not portray the women characters with appropriate deliberation. Any representation of a community would remain incomplete without providing the details of the women of the time. The present paper aims at exploring the subtle representation of women characters in *Such a Long Journey*.

Representation of Women Characters in *Such a Long Journey*:

The theme of *Such a Long Journey* is that of a 'man's' search of the meaning of life and not that of a 'woman'. Is this just a nomenclature or there is any sense in it? Does the term 'man' inclusive of women in it as well? If so, do women in the society and as a representation of them in literature need to be referred separately? These are a few questions we need to ponder upon. Further, sustaining goodness of mankind is such that it leads to goodness in the posterity. Whether the author of this fact or not is a matter of discussion.



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Rohinton Mistry started writing novels during the last decade of the 20th century somewhere around 1991, with his first novel *Such a Long Journey* was an instant success. *Such a Long Journey* earned him great fame and name. The novel was nominated for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize nomination and was also awarded the Governor-General's Literary Award for English Language Fiction in the year 1991. The following year in March, *Such a Long Journey* has also received the W. H. Smith and Books in Canada First Novel Award. As he confessed in an interview to Val Ross, he had regularly devoted his time in the pursuit of writing. He used to sit religiously each morning to write for several months and years at a stretch.

Woman characters in Rohinton Mistry's novels can be categorized in two broad categories: the first are those who earn readers' respect and acceptance due to their larger than life characterization and the second are those who earn readers' contempt as well as rejection. One such female character is Dilnavaz in of *Such A Long Journey*. She is wife of the protagonist Gustad. *Such a Long Journey* opens in the year 1971 in Bombay, Maharashtra. It depicts the tale of Gustad Noble, a lower-middle-class Parsi who's struggling to make two ends meet and keep his family. Along with Gustad, Dilnavaz also undergoes a great suffering and drudgery of lower middle household. It's needless to say that the amount of space and span that Mistry's male characters get is much more compared to his female characters. We need to study Mystry's novels minutely in order to find female representation. Male characters are too prolifically portrayed that they can be studied elaborately. However, in order to study female characters, we need to rely on their male counter parts. Gustad and Dilnavaz are portrayed as an apparent contrast where male being aggressive and female being docile. Dilnavaz represents a universal feminine energy that performs multitasking role of a caring mother and loving wife. She possesses all the qualities of a perfect Indian housewife. Unlike her husband Gustad, she has not been given the spotlight by the novelist. Thus, she lingers at the margins of the novel. She represents domestic crisis of all women across India. The following lines echo this notion:

...Dilnavaz awoke automatically, and her First thoughts were about Gustad and Soharb...Drums to fill. Hurry, Kitchen tank to fill. That big bucket. And milk to buy... (SALJ 62)

Dilnavaz lives in Parsi colony with her husband Gustad and three children. They are a hard-working middle class family. The family facing more and more financial crisis especially after their eldest son, Sohrab refused to join in the reputed IIT even after getting admission in it. It is through numerous and prolonged conversation between Gustad and Dilnavaz, or Gaustad and other Parsi members of the colony or Gustad and his colleagues and close friend Dinshawji. From their conversation with Gustad and Dilnavaz we come to know about the status of a woman in a Parsi middle class family. It is an established fact that



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women play a very vital role in the rise and fall of any community, caste or religion. Though Gustad is the protagonist of the novel, there are a few women characters that play a substantial role in the development of the novel and other male characters. In fact, we get to know the perspectives of another male protagonist through her compelling character. Some of these interactions were wry and outright blunt about the contemporary local Maharashtrians and their ways of life. The character Dinshawji is surely unhappy with the locals in general and dabbawala in particular. In fact, it is due to these explicit expressions, it led to the controversy and ultimately owing to the controversy the novel was withdrawn from the syllabus of Mumbai University.

Such a Long Journey: a Social Document of Woman as Man's Counterfoil:

As Mistry also shared in one of his interviews, *Such a Long Journey* was written in three drafts highlighting with three corresponding themes. In one of the drafts, he dealt with the theme of Indian superstition in the novel that affects directly or indirectly the women folks of the society. However, he did not consider that draft thinking it to be overtly discussion by many of the left-liberals that backlash anything of India and India culture. *Such a Long Journey* has a set of far-off lands from the Canadian Society of Toronto in the west where Rohinton Mistry wrote his first novel. The fictional world of Rohinton Mistry authentically deals with the theme of life and time of lower-middle-class families of the Parsi community of Bombay during 1970s in both *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and *Such a Long Journey*. These stories deal with the human struggle to exit in adverse economic conditions. Hence, it is inevitable that it covers women characters in it. However, it does not mean that Rohinton Mistry dealt with women consciousness. It also does not mean that he was concerned with the issues pertaining to women of the then Indian society. If we look at the range of women characters in the novel we came to know that most women characters are counterfoils of their male counterparts. Thus, they do not demonstrate the women consciousness that feminist discussed and deliberate upon.

The theme of a 'long journey in the quest of identity', is represented in the novel through a saner and clearer way by the character of Gustad who started receiving money secretly from an old friend that enabled him to go on a long journey. As it happens in the theme of 'quest' the journey of the protagonist character Gustad leads to his personal and political transformation enables the author to represent new meaning in the life of Gustad. The novel documents in breadth and width the life journey of Gustad along with the upheavals and turmoil that overtook the Indian political system during the reign of Indira Gandhi. Thus, the novel is representative of its race, milieu and movement and at the same time, it brings forward the individual traits and flavor of its own. It has been critically acclaimed throughout the world and has been



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translated in to many foreign languages such as Swedish, German, Norwegian, Japanese and Danish. The novel is also adapted into a major motion picture with same title *Such a Long Journey* in 1998.

The Khodadad Building that appears repeatedly in *Such a Long Journey* can be considered as a *leitmotif* of the novel. This building creates the world of its own. It represents a dwelling place that houses and nourishes its dwellers. Thus, it stands as a mother womb that houses and nourishes the life that grows in it. Nevertheless, Khodadad Building is nothing but a representation of Firozsha Baag which is yet another fictional Avatar of a central theme of Rohinton Mistry's novels. Both of these imaginary settings create a miniature world in itself with all its assorted characters and their ordinary human conflicts and their astonishing variety of unconventionality. The world depicted in Khodadad Building is ornately immersed with the hue of the life and time of Bombay. The representation of the contemporary milieu of Khodadad Building was as picturesque as that of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as well as in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. Firozsha Baag and Khodadad Building are depicted as the heart and soul of the throbbing city and at the same time a different worldview altogether. Both the places maintained their integrity intact in the same way as the Parsi community has maintained its distinguishing character and culture in a predominantly Hindu community of India.

As the main theme of Rohinton Mistry is to represent the journey of struggle which is usually led by male characters, most protagonists of the novels are male. However, the proposed hypothesis of the present study, the novel does not represent the women characters and their struggle and anxiety with the same breadth and width as the male characters are represented. The few women character that appears in the novel such as Gustad's wife and daughter Dilnavaz Noble and Roshan Noble, Khodabad Building Residents Miss Kutpitia and Mrs Pastakia that are represented as the counterfoil to the male characters or their supplements. Even the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is referred to in the novel but she is not dealt with the depth and vigour that she stood in real life of Indian politics. Thus, these narratives of women, deal with the human struggle to exit in adverse economic conditions. It is inevitable therefore that it covers women characters in it. Her character plays a substantial role in the expansion of the novel and other male characters. In fact, we get to know the standpoint of another male protagonist through her charismatic character. However, it does not mean that Rohinton Mistry dealt with women consciousness. It also does not mean that he was concerned with the issues pertaining to women of the then Indian society. If we look at the range of women characters in the novel we came to know that most women characters are counterfoils of their male counterparts. Thus, they do not establish the women consciousness that feminist discussed and deliberated upon in the society and literature.



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Conclusion:

Thus, the female characters of Rohinton Mistry exhibit a considerable amount of roles in extending the novel along with other dominating male characters. In fact, we get to know the perspectives/standpoint of another male protagonist through her charismatic/compelling character. Hence, it is inevitable that it covers women characters in it. However, it does not mean that Rohinton Mistry dealt with women consciousness. As mentioned in the hypothesis of the novel, the study especially aims at studying, the women characters in particular and the representation and treatment given to them in the selected novels of Rohinton Mistry. There can be seen a prototypes thematic concerns in all three select novels of Rohinton Mistry i.e. the representation of Parsi Community in India and their point of views which has its historical significance. There can also be seen the recurrent theme of identity crisis among the Parsi Community and their struggle to survive as an indigenous community in India even after centuries of their official assimilation in India as one among many who can to India as outsiders but ultimately they become Indian during the process.



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