

ROMANTIC IDEALS IN THE WRITINGS OF ROHINTON MISTRY**Mrs. J.Pauline Jeevitha,**Guest Lecturer, Department of English,
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(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli)**Abstract:**

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born Canadian novelist whose experimental venture in writing had created ripples in the understanding of the life of an ordinary man waging mighty battles and emerging victorious in a day-to-day basis. His characters do not dwell in palaces nor deliver pompous speeches but lay exposed to the senseless schemes of the ivory tower thinkers and cherish the memories they make every day. They have time to lend and learn from children and are aware of the disastrous machinery and find comfort in the little breeze by the window sill. They do not seek popularity but money to lead a decent life. They are rebels by nature but the gripping reality had slumped them with ill-fate and destiny. This paper aims to expose the romantic ideals in two of his novels namely "*A Fine Balance*" and "*Family Matters*". These novels have enjoyed much readership and are widely received as a masterpiece of art.

Key Words: Romantic, freedom, nature, emotion, memories, struggles, man, power, humanism.

Rohinton Mistry's experimentation with life begins with his digging in pen into the life of people who are away from lime-light. These are stories of people battered by fate, misfortune, misery and people in power.

A Fine Balance (1996) is the second novel to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Each page echoes the miseries of people affected during the Emergency period declared by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Mistry was very much in alignment with William Wordsworth who began the Romantic movement in 1798 through the publication of *Lyrical*

Ballads. He says, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive" (William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*). French Revolution took a toll on the psyche of sensitive writers like Wordsworth. The writers were aghast as their world was falling apart and nature was destroyed in the name of progress. The disturbed mind wished for peace and harmony. The industrial revolution triggered the migration of people to cities resulting in poor sanitation conditions and impoverished housing boards called slums. The same could be witnessed in India in the making of developed nation. Mumbai is a city still beaming with life because of the industries and ample amount of job opportunities that it offers.

Rohinton Mistry gives a complete picture of people in the slums of Mumbai aspiring to get a decent life amidst their poverty- stricken sheets and irregular supply of water. Ishwar Darji, Omprakash Darji and Rajaram dwell in the same slum and they discuss their desire to go back to their villages after earning enough,

'Yes, thousands and thousands are coming to the city because of bad times in their native place. I came for the same reason'

'But we don't want to stay too long.'

'Nobody does,' said Rajaram. 'Who wants to live like this?' His hand moved in semicircle, taking in the squalid hutments, the rugged field, the huge slum across the road wearing its malodorous crown of cooking smoke and industrial effluvia. 'But sometimes people have no choice. Sometimes the city grabs you, sinks its claw into you, and refuses to let go! (pg.no.171,172)

Wordsworth started losing his faith in French Revolution when it started to act opposite to the ideals it stood for. Mistry employs sarcasm to delve deep into the political atmosphere of the Emergency period which was declared in 1975. The twenty- one month period of emergency included Beautification of the City, Family Planning Programme, silencing of the press and media and people misusing power to avenge their critics and haters and usurping wealth by bending the rules and regulations of the emergency period for their own profit.

The iron curtain drawn during the period, helped the people in power to accomplish their tasks without any hindrance. Ishwar Darji and Omprakash Darji were evicted out of their slum without notice and were taken to the outskirts of the city to break stones under irrigation project. They were then sold to Beggarmaster to beg in the streets. They ransomed themselves by promising an amount as they would work for Dina Dalal as tailors. Towards the end we find them mutilated under Family Planning Programme. The silent bearers of senseless schemes had no way to express the futility of the governmental policies as the rich

thrived simultaneously during the period. Power corrupts people irrespective of their moral standards and ethical values of whichever party they claim to be.

Romantic era witnessed the idea of romantic love that diluted the moral understanding of marital contract between man and woman. Importance to women empowerment and choosing their own partners irrespective of their social status and class became prominent. Extra-marital affairs and the taboo – labelled subjects were brought out in many novel forms. Mistry projects Dina Dalal as a rebel. She fought for her rights and chose a man below her socio-economic status. Even after the death of her husband, she chose to live independently in their flat. Though she couldn't remarry, she was in a serious relationship with a man younger to her. The memories of her late husband stopped her from continuing with that relationship. Mistry makes his characters speak for themselves and justify their actions and motifs. When Om and Ishwar joined her as employees, she became happy once again, 'No need now to visit her brother and beg for next month's rent. She took a deep breath. Once again, her fragile independence was preserved' (pg.no.11)

Freedom is an elusive ideal of the Romantic movement. Mistry records the struggle of Dukhi Mocha in breaking their traditional occupation as Chamaars or tanners. He sent his two sons Ishwar and Narayan to learn the trade of tailoring from Ashraf in the city. Narayan also was a rebel by voting in the election. Dukhi and Narayan were burned to death by Thakur Dharamsi at the end. Despite their end, they were path makers and are always remembered for their bravery.

'Celebrating nature' is yet another ideal of Romanticism. The landscape of England was totally ripped apart in the name of progress. The introduction of machinery and industries made poets and writers sensitive to the change that was happening in their premise. Mistry laments the loss of hills through Maneck's father Mr. Kohlah. He loved the hills more than himself. He became heartbroken when they drilled the hills to widen the roads for transportation and commerce. It made him silent as it affected him in profoundable measures.

'Nowadays, every stroll was like a deathwatch, to see what was still standing and what had been felled. Coming upon a favourite tree, he would stop under its branches a while before moving on. He would run his hand along the gnarled trunk, happy that an old friend had survived another day. Many of the rocky ledges that he used to sit on to watch the sunset had been removed by dynamite. When he did find one, he rested for a few minutes and wondered if it would be here for him the next time. Before long they began

talking in town about him. 'Mr.Kohlah's screw is getting loose,' they said. 'He speaks to trees and rocks, and pats them like they were his dogs.' (pg.no.218)

Mistry adds that when nature rebelled against the assault, Kohlah felt happy. They started witnessing landslides and avalanches. The snow-covered mountains were now barely covered with snow even at the time of winter. *Family Matters* fixed the focus on the mundane routine of a middle-class family in Mumbai. It brought out the genuine love hidden in the heart of children. A nine-year old's point of view holds the story together. Sensitive heart and innocent perspective that the child possess brings hope to humanity. When Nariman Vakeel, a seventy-nine-year old retired English Professor had to stay with his daughter in pleasant villa, Jehangir (nine-year-old son) took care of his grandfather. He fed him as his hands shake a lot and held his hands at night when the dear old man encountered terrible nightmares of his past. The importance of touch in old age is exemplified further by Jehangir. He had the habit of gently squeezing Nariman's wobbly chin and his daughter finds it a good thing to do when her step brother and step sister left their father under her care.

"She stroked his lightly stubbled chin and gave it a gently squeeze

He smiled. "You too? What is it with my chin?"

She squeezed again. "Sometimes our children teach us nice things."(pg.no.106)

When emotions mixed with memories are buried in a non-living object, it becomes a solace to merely touch it and remember the by gone days of joy and laughter. Despite its function of replaying the happy moment, it deepens the pain of loss at the present. In the novel *Family Matters* we find Villie, the card master reminiscing her happy childhood through the photo and the table-cloth. They are symbolic of her wealthy days but she easily lets them go when the situation demands. She gives away the table cloth to Yezad as her brother had taken away the table when he moved into his new flat. The novel personifies Past as a character in constant interaction with the happenings in the novel. Nariman could not let go of his past as it haunts him through the nights. He advises Roxana, to savour the happy moments to defeat the sadness in life. He wants her to use things to create memories and not lock them away because it is costly and fragile.

Mistry gives a detailed account of everyday life. Romanticism believes in the significant role played by everyman. The focus was on the working class rather than the aristocrats of the classical period. In *Family Matters* we find Yezad slogging for fifteen years at Bombay Sports Emporium with sincerity and honesty but there was no hike in his payment. Mistry had dedicated many lines to describe the working class. We could find a

beautiful description of the market place in the beginning of the novel. Nariman's stroll made him feel fresh as a daisy. He watches the vegetable vendors displaying the fresh vegetables and men at flower stall twining the flowers with an artistic touch. The bhel-bhuri stall was described as a landscape in itself and a man carrying bunches of bananas to put up a stall felt like a magic to Nariman.

“French beans, sweet potatoes, coriander, green chilies, cabbages, cauliflowers bloomed under the street lights, hallowing the dusk with their colour and fragrance... In the flower stall two men sat like musicians, weaving strands of marigold, garlands of jasmine and lily and rose, their fingers picking, plucking, knotting, playing a floral melody... The bhel-puri stall was a sculptured landscape with its golden pyramid of sev, the little snow mountain of mumra, hillocks of puris, and, in among their valleys, in aluminium containers, pools of green and brown and red chutneys. A man selling bananas strolled up and down the street. The bunches were stacked high and heavy upon his outstretched arm; a balancing and strong-man act rolled into one. (pg.no.5,6)

Romanticism is concerned about the life of each and every individual in the society. It took pains in recording the fragile independence of people, their idiosyncratic dialect, culture and custom. It never undermined nor segregated people because of the language they spoke. Wordsworth in Lyrical Ballads made it clear that ‘to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate...in a selection of language really used by men’. We could find a mix of Hinglish in very many places in the two novels by Mistry. He preferred to preserve the local colour and uniqueness of culture and place discussed in the novels. In *Family Matters*, when Nariman fell into the hole dug by telephone company, the ghatis took him home and Jal's conversation with the ghatis or Marathi speaking locals is as follows,

“Chalo, bring him in! Nahin, don't put him on the floor! Sofa ki ooper rakho! Wait, maybe inside on the palung is better.” He led them to Nariman's room. “Theek hai, gently, that's good.” (pg.no. 49)

Mistry also painfully registers the history of his Zoroastrian race, their culture and custom as it is in the verge of getting extinct from the earth. The unique contribution of his people in building the modern India is also discussed in detail in his works. Mistry celebrates his rich culture and takes pride in being identified as a ‘Parsi’.

Mistry employs the gothic tradition of describing places that have an evil hold in the life of his characters. He uses his imagination to paint Chateau Felicity as a gloomy

residence. Jal Contractor, the stepson of Nariman considers Chateau Felicity as a cursed habitat. When Edul Munshi, the DIY neighbour of the flat agreed to work on the repaired ceiling and was doubted by his wife Manizeh for cheating on her with Coomy, a spinster by his side, Jal thinks of the fall of his mother and his step father's obsessive lover from the apartment's terrace that brought in the endless sorrow to have now permeated into the life of innocent Edul Munshi.

“Edul had ventured into the house of unhappiness, the house that had destroyed families, killed two women, given birth to generations of sorrow.

And the contagion had affected her husband” (pg.no. 351)

Prophetic enough, Edul Munshi died along with Coomy while replacing the supposed -to-be-rotten-beam. Nariman was not allowed to marry a non- parsi girl by his father and we could find the same with Yezad putting on the shoes of Marazban Vakeel and forbidding his two sons to have any contact with the non-parsis. Yezad's obsession with religion became prominent after his family moved into Chateau Felicity. Nariman while being taken in a stretcher to Pleasant villa after the fall finds the pictures of his forefathers looking at him,

“As they marched down the passageway, Nariman opened his eyes. From his supine position he saw the glum portraits of his forefathers on the walls. Strange, how their eyes looked at him—as though they were the living and he the dead.” (pg.no.89)

Humanism grew out of Romanticism and we could identify a humanist and a romanticist in Rohinton Mistry. Thus, Mistry successfully explores the ideals of romanticism in his writings.

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