ABSTRACT

TOPIC OF RESEARCH

CRITIQUING NATION AND NATIONALISM : A STUDY OF ROHINSTON MISTRY'S FICTION

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Supervised by

Dr. P.S. Ramana
Professor of English
Punjabi University Regional Centre
Bathinda

Submitted by

Ajay Verma

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PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA
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ABSTRACT

The study begins with the main assumption that several important meanings can be obtained from the conjunction of postcolonial literature (both in the temporal and thematic senses) and nation and nationalism. One of the central thematic concerns of postcolonial literature has been an interrogation of the nation-state, nation and nationalism as political, cultural and historical entities. This consequently involves a foregrounding of these categories in literary writings. The concern with these categories is prominently present in the case of individuals and writers belonging to minority communities dealing with societies divided along racial, religious, cultural, linguistic or other sectarian lines. Moreover, nation as a category has been interpreted and re-interpreted differently by theorists owing allegiance to different theoretical paradigms like Marxism, Post-Structuralism and Neo-Historicism. Rohinton Mistry’s writings are a serious and meaningful intervention in this theme. His location as a migrant Parsi writer places him in an interesting relationship with postcolonial India. The present study taking a historicist view of history and taking Mistry’s works to be an alternative form of history aims at obtaining the meaning of the texts under study by relating the delineation of postcolonial India to the geo-political, cultural and religious location from which they are produced. It is equally an attempt to study the proclivities and specificities of Mistry’s position on nation and nationalism as a Parsi migrant writer as well as the relevance of such an intervention in the larger context of the available discourses on the subject. The thesis also proceeds with the objective of scrutinizing the various contemporary and historical explanations of the terms nation-state, nation and nationalism in the generic sense for utilizing these in a delimited attention to the postcolonial nation and nationalism. Furthermore, an exploration of the site of postcolonial nation and its theoretical accounting for in postcolonial theory assumes central importance owing to the premise that Mistry’s writings are also one such exercise. Thus, a consideration of contemporary opinion within Postcolonial Studies Discourse through the opinions of important writers like Partha Chatterjee and AshisNandy and that of its relevance to or differences with Mistry’s professions assumes some importance. It is from this confluence of generic/traditional and postcolonial positions and Mistry’s own specific perspective that the present thesis arrives at some arguments about the method and meaning of Mistry’s fiction. The thematic substance of the present study comprises Mistry’s approach towards the ideas of postcolonial nation and nationalism as visible in the various aspects of his fiction; the subjective, objective and theoretical reasons behind his disapproval and critique of postcolonial India and the points of salience his critique
selects for foregrounding. Before theorizing Mistry’s texts on the basis of their position on postcolonial nation and nationalism the focus, throughout the first chapter titled, “Nation/Nationalism and the Postcolonial Literatures” remains on some important theories on the subject of nation and nationalism. The terms, as the diverse critical opinion reflects, have been far from unproblematic primarily because they have attended conflictual and violent social and political orders at local and global levels. In a most commonly accepted sense nationalism has been approached by critics and thinkers by emphasizing its capacity as a provider of identity for individuals conscious of forming groups based on common culture, past, project for the future and attachment to a concrete territory. However, in contemporary times the most meaningful critical engagements, like that of Misty, are characterized by skepticism and a mood of intense interrogation. There is also in the present day critical discourse the expression of a dual imagination of either asserting national and sub-national identities or the wish to transcend them for global and transnational alliances of economy and culture. Mistry’s fiction both at the level of the selection of subjects and in its place as the work of a migrant of Indian origin writing in English language from the West has to be placed at this conjuncture in order to unravel the nuances of his critique and the politics of its production.