
Deconstruction of Rohinton Mistry's powerless fictional Parsees in contrast to the most powerful non-fictional Parsees of India: Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal and Nariman Vakeel as against Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata

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Abstract

This study delves into Rohinton Mistry's Parsee characters, such as Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal, and Nariman Vakeel. Rather than dissecting the characters, the focus is on understanding their significance for the Parsee community in India, comparing them to real-life figures like Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej, and Ratan Tata. Character breakdowns reveal stark differences, portraying Gustad as a weak Parsee facing cultural challenges, contrasting with Wadia's strength and business success. Similar distinctions are found in Dina Dalal and Parmeshwar Godrej, highlighting the struggles of a constrained Parsee woman versus a powerful and philanthropic one. However, it's noted that Mistry's stories may oversimplify Parsees' lives.

Exploring characters like Nariman Vakeel and Ratan Tata sheds light on Parsees' experiences. Nariman faces racial prejudice, illustrating societal challenges, while Tata is an influential figure contributing to Indian society. These stories showcase diverse Parsee experiences, emphasizing historical challenges and social responsibility. Analyzing both fictional and real characters aids in understanding cultural and historical contexts. Mistry's portrayal prompts questions about stereotypes and recognizes diversity in Parsee community. Real-life examples demonstrate Parsees' contributions, revealing their influence in India. This study advises readers to approach Mistry's stories with an awareness

of potential biases. It emphasizes the importance of considering different perspectives for a comprehensive understanding of Parsees' experiences in India. The analysis encourages reflecting on the intersection of literature and real life, fostering a deeper exploration of Parsee identity in both fiction and reality.

Keywords: Rohinton Mistry, Deconstruction, Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal, Nariman Vakeel, Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej, Ratan Tata, Parsee community, Indian society, Parsee identity

Introduction

As the concept of deconstruction gets applied to Rohinton Mistry's powerless fictional Parsee characters such as Gustad Noble from *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Dina (Shroff) Dalal from *A Fine Balance* (1995), and Nariman Vakeel from *Family Matters* (2002), the approach does not stand specific to imply "demolition" of these characters. However, on the contrary, the approach of this research paper follows the process of "breaking down" or rather being engrossed in analyzing significant elements, especially the words delivered by these characters in specific fictional narratives of Mistry. The objective of this implication is to unearth the true

significance of these characters as representatives of Parsee communities in contrast to the most powerful non-fictional Parsees of India, Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata. The relevance of this comparative analysis is subject to generating the real-life status of the Parsees in India in comparison with Mistry's intended characterisation of the status of the Parsee population in India.

Deconstruction as the Key

Introduced by Jacques Derrida, deconstruction challenges Platonism's emphasis on absolute forms and essences, exposing binary and hierarchical oppositions like nature/culture or speech/writing (Sikirivwa 45-51). As elaborated by OLR, Derrida questions foundational distinctions in Western philosophy, offering deconstruction as a set of methods exploring language and logic in texts to unravel the text-meaning relationship. In the realm of realism, deconstruction critiques traditional interpretations, revealing the constructed nature of representations in art and literature. It questions language's stability, examining how it shapes reality perception and highlighting multiple perspectives in realist works. Breaking down binary oppositions and considering intertextuality, deconstruction provides a lens for understanding reality's construction within cultural and historical contexts. The deconstruction process delves into tensions and contradictions, revealing that neither term in opposition is inherently primary; instead, it is a product or "*construction*" of the text, not an independent entity (Sikirivwa 52-55).

As this approach implied Mistry's powerless fictional Parsees as against the most powerful non-fictional Parsees of India, it becomes significant to note that there are extensive senses of differences from the kind of imagery that Mistry was trying to depict. The problematic representation of Parsees by Mistry, especially through Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal and Nariman Vakeel, gets questioned repeatedly as these characters come in close encounters with Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata.

Fictional Parsees in Mistry's Novels

The selected powerless fictional Parsees from the novels of Mistry are - Gustad Noble from *Such a Long Journey*, Dina Dalal from *A Fine Balance*, and Nariman Vakeel from *Family Matters*.

Gustad Noble takes centre stage in Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, navigating the political turbulence of 1970s India. As a bank clerk, Gustad was facing challenges that tested his resilience. The novel explores key themes of political upheaval, societal pressures, and the fragility of stability in the face of external forces, depicting Gustad's struggle with powerlessness amid India's political turmoil. His experiences during the Emergency period highlight his lack of control over the political and social upheavals that impacted his life and family.

On the other hand, Dina Dalal, a central figure in *A Fine Balance*, is a widowed small business owner striving for independence in a male-dominated society, grappling with economic hardships and personal relationships. The novel explores key themes of gender dynamics, economic challenges, and the pursuit of autonomy in a traditional setting, highlighting Dina's powerlessness in the face of societal expectations and obstacles to her attempts at asserting independence. Her challenges in sustaining her tailoring business and personal life exemplify the constraints imposed by societal norms and economic limitations.

Finally, Nariman Vakeel in Mistry's *Family Matters* grapples with health issues and family discord as a retired bank clerk in Bombay. The narrative delves into his journey navigating the complexities of family ties, political events, and personal health challenges, highlighting themes of powerlessness, familial conflict, and the impact of historical events on individual lives. Nariman's struggle with deteriorating health and dependence on others for care exemplify his powerlessness, evident when family decisions are made without his active involvement in shaping his future.

Non-fictional Parsees in India

To deconstruct the narrative depiction of Mistry's characters this research aims to evaluate the status of powerful non-fictional

Parsees in India and these real-life business tycoons are- Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata.

Nusli Wadia is a renowned industrialist, who served as the chairman of the Wadia Group. The Wadia Group is a conglomerate with diverse business interests spanning textiles to aviation. Nusli Wadia's significant contributions include leadership in business, strategic decision-making, and shaping the industrial landscape, showcasing his influential role in guiding the group's success. Wadia's impact is exemplified by his leadership and strategic decision-making that profoundly influences the enterprises within the conglomerate.

On the other hand, Parmeshwar Godrej is identified as a prominent figure within the influential Godrej family and is associated with the Godrej Group. Parmeshwar Godrej is recognized as a socialite and philanthropist who contribute to art, culture, and social causes. Her key contributions encompassed philanthropy, cultural enrichment, and engagement in social causes beyond the realm of business. Parmeshwar's influence extended beyond business and remained evident in her impact on social and cultural spheres through philanthropic initiatives.

Finally, Ratan Tata is a revered figure in Indian business, who chaired the Tata Group, overseeing its global expansion and diversification into sectors such as steel, automobiles, and information technology. His key contributions include steering global business expansion, philanthropy, and shaping the enduring legacy of the Tata Group. As the former chairman, Ratan Tata's esteemed reputation extends beyond business, particularly through philanthropic endeavours like the Tata Trusts, underscoring his influence beyond corporate leadership.

Deconstruction of Fictional Parsees

Gustad Noble

To deconstruct the character of Mistry's fictional character Gustad Noble from *Such a Long Journey* (1991), it is important to interpret the words delivered by the character.

"But the artist began to have misgivings as the wall underwent its transformation. Bigger than any pavement project he had yet undertaken, it made him restless. Over the years, a precise cycle had entered the rhythm of his life, the cycle of arrival, creation, and obliteration. Like sleeping, waking and stretching, or eating, digesting and excreting, the cycle sang in harmony with the blood in his veins and the breath in his lungs. He learned to disdain the overlong sojourn and the procrastinated departure, for they were the progenitors of complacent routine, to be shunned at all costs. The journey - chanced, unplanned, solitary - was the thing to relish." (184)

There is no deny to the fact that Gustad had the core understanding of the environment created around him by Mistry and the essence of realism was dominant in him. This is evident from the symbolic declaration of his words. From phrases like *"the cycle sang in harmony with the blood in his veins and the breath in his lungs"*, Gustad very efficiently used metaphorical language to convey the stability and naturalness of his life cycle. However, the transformation of the wall introduces a disruption, implying a potential instability in his established language of life. Declarations related to the life cycle get drawn by intertextuality as it connects the human experience to the broader, universal cycles of Gustad, who also represented powerless Parsee status in India.

As a Parsee, Mistry constructed Gustad with the nature to disdain for overlong sojourns and it is Gustad's procrastinated departures which reflect a cultural or historical context that values efficiency and avoids complacent routines. On the contrary, Mistry noted that the construction of a larger wall disrupts Gustad's established cycle, signalling a deconstruction of his usual rhythm of life, which eventually represents a dedicated Parsee with a weak socio-cultural status in India.

Dina Dalal

In *A Fine Balance* by Mistry (1995), Dina gets described as,

"Dina is a young girl, full of energy. It will be good for her, to teach her how to look after a home (18). ... The pattern of each day, thought

Dina at the end of the first week, was like the pattern of a well-cut dress, the four of them fitting together without having to tug or pull to make the edges meet. The seams were straight and neat. (47)

In the case of Dina, words that represented her in the novel were more related to the depiction of gender roles by Mistry. Dina is described as a young girl and the idea of teaching her to look after a home reflects societal norms and expectations, which aligns with real-world expectations for women, especially under a patriarchal regime. As Mistry remained focused on teaching Dina the way to look after a home, appears to be an oppressed realistic representation of Parsee women and women in general. The 'well-cut dress' serves as a metaphor for the smooth, well-ordered life, which conveys stability and a sense of order in the lives of Parsee women. Moreover, the well-cut dress analogy is intertextual, drawing on the reader's cultural understanding of clothing as a symbol of order and design. This reference connects the characters' daily lives to broader cultural associations with aesthetics and precision.

Further, the description of seams being 'straight and neat' emphasizes the stability and precision in the daily life choices of Dina by Mistry. Mistry's language reinforces the idea of a structured and harmonious existence, whereby Dina is marked responsible for reflecting cultural and historical gender norms as determined by patriarchy and as ingrained in the narrative. Thus, in the social structure, Mistry narrated Dina as an entity like the 'well-cut dress' to reflect cultural values of order and social harmony, even though that creates all kinds of mental suffering for her. This is established by the deconstruction of the potential limitations and constraints associated with a rigid and predetermined pattern as depicted by Mistry. It invites readers to reflect on the trade-offs between order and individual agency.

Nariman Vakeel

As stated in *Family Matters* by Mistry (2002) "...rabid racist who, in his maniacal quest for purity, wouldn't think twice about eliminating the spouses and offspring of intermarriage. (133) ... In work and in play, we, the children

of Mother India, must be as one family to free her from the chains in which she was enslaved" (215).

As the character of Nariman Vakeel gets deconstructed, it has been noted that Vakeel (rather Mistry, the creator) bore severe experience of racial prejudice in India. As the term 'rabid racist' gets depicted which stands for extreme violence, Mistry made it obvious that the Parsees in India never felt safe or secure. Further, the mention of a "maniacal quest for purity" reflects realistic depictions of extremist attitudes that can exist within individuals. This portrayal touches on the darker aspects of human behaviour and prejudice that Parsees faced in India.

However, Mistry also added the practice of intolerance towards intermarriage among the Parsees in India. In a way, this language adds a sense of urgency and extremism to the character's convictions. The evocative metaphorical expressions like "eliminating the spouses and offspring of intermarriage" is a powerful and stable expression that conveys the severity of Nariman's or rather Mistry's views on the prejudice that prevails in Indian society and leads to restrictions in the Parsee community. It suggests a drastic and destructive approach to maintaining what Nariman perceives as purity. In this context, the reference to a "maniacal quest for purity" and the context of intermarriage is intertextual. Drawing on broader cultural and historical contexts where ideas of purity like the nationalist rhetoric, 'we the children of Mother India must be as one family' gets ironically marked amidst the prejudice for Parsees in Indian social structure, and transforms Parsee community within themselves. In a way, Mistry's portrayal of Nariman allows for an examination of the complexities and dangers associated with extremist ideologies that are the result of Indian prejudice for the Parsees.

Deconstruction of Non-fictional Parsees

Nusli Wadia

In the words of Nusli Wadia, "I don't draw wooden swords." (Karmali) ... "My independent stand has aggravated Tata Sons and my removal is being sought because I chose not to follow their diktat. My fiduciary

duty is to you and not to an unidentified Tata Group". (Datta)

As the quotations recognised by Forbes get deconstructed for Nusli Wadia, it has been noted that Wadia was a strong Parsee, who dared to take stronger steps and attain success in the competitive business world. His intertextual reference, "*I don't draw wooden swords*" is so metaphorical that Wadia expresses very adamantly that he never gets engaged in symbolic or insincere actions thereby conveying a sense of authenticity and seriousness. The use of strong and clear language adds a sense of conviction and straightforwardness to the statement. Further, terms like "*diktat*" and "*fiduciary duty*" convey a sense of legal and ethical seriousness in the cultural and historical contexts of the corporate world in India. 'Fiduciary duty' implies a legal and ethical responsibility to act in the best interests of the stakeholders. This aligns with real-world corporate practices and is highly appreciated within India considering Wadia as a strong Indian.

The mention of Tata Sons and the Tata Group is intertextual as the reference connects Wadia's statement to the broader context of the Tata conglomerate. This reference draws on the reader's knowledge of corporate dynamics and the historical significance of the Tata Group in India & the strong role that Wadia played in the process.

Parmeshwar Godrej

"It gives me tremendous emotional satisfaction to be able to bring about positive changes in the lives of others. In addition, when one is fortunate enough to be in a position to help others, I believe it is a responsibility to do so." (Jain)

The deconstruction of the words delivered by Parmeshwar Godrej refers to her "*tremendous emotional satisfaction*" attained by making a positive impact on the lives of others. It reflects a genuine human experience which thrives her as a strong powerful Parsee woman in Indian society and a person beyond any kind of discrimination or prejudice. The phrase "*bring about positive changes*" adds clarity and purpose to her humanitarian expressions and her values.

The emphasis on bringing about positive changes in the lives of others has intertextual connections to broader cultural and historical traditions of philanthropy. It aligns with societal values that often appreciate and encourage acts of giving and social responsibility. The idea that being in a fortunate position entails a responsibility to help others is rooted in cultural and historical contexts that recognize the importance of social responsibility, particularly among those with privilege. In a way, the statements by Parmeshwar Godrej exhibit elements of realism through the acknowledgement of emotional satisfaction and ethical responsibility. The potential for deconstruction lies in exploring the motivations behind philanthropy and the relationship between privilege and responsibility.

Ratan Tata

"I have a great sense of pride that over 125 years, Sir Ratanji Tata left his legacy to philanthropic causes ... JRD Tata often used to refer to the Tatas as being the 'trustees of the people'. The Tata family could have become tremendously wealthy by having distributorships, by having partnerships etc in businesses but most of the businesses whether it was steel, power, or institutions were set up as institutions for the country." (CNBC-TV18)

Ratan Tata's legacy of philanthropy over 125 years reflects a realistic acknowledgement of the Tata family's historical contributions. The acknowledgement that the Tata family could have pursued more financially lucrative paths, such as distributorships or partnerships, adds a realistic dimension, yet Ratan Tata made choices in the context of his commitment to Indian societal impact. The identification of Tatas, especially JRD Tata as "*trustees of the people*" provides the stable historical anchor to the Indian economic construct and marked the values of the Parsee Tata family in India with great pride. The phrase "*most of the businesses were set up as institutions for the country*" is stable language conveying a sense of purpose and long-term commitment. It emphasizes the establishment of enduring institutions rather

than short-term profit-oriented ventures for India.

The mention that Ratan Tata "*could have become tremendously wealthy*" suggests that he had opportunities for lucrative business ventures like distributorships or partnerships. However, the emphasis on choosing to establish businesses as institutions for the country underscores Ratan Tata's values and priorities. Thus, rather than representing any trace of weakness or victim of prejudice in Indian society Ratan Tata exemplified an ideal image of commitment to philanthropy, which aligns with broader cultural values emphasizing social responsibility and community welfare for Indian socio-economic foundation.

Comparative Analysis of Parsee Entities

In the deconstruction of Gustad Noble and Nusli Wadia, a stark contrast emerges. Gustad embodies a weak Parsee, marked by disruptions in his life cycle and adherence to cultural values, while Wadia stands out as a strong Parsee, characterized by bold actions, authenticity, and a commitment to legal and ethical responsibilities in the corporate world. The intertextual references further solidify their positions, with Gustad symbolizing a powerless Parsee within the broader human experience, and Wadia being intertwined with the historical significance of the Tata Group, representing strength and success in the Indian corporate landscape.

In comparing Dina Dalal and Parmeshwar Godrej, a stark contrast emerges between the portrayal of a constrained Parsee woman, grappling with societal expectations and limitations, and a strong Parsee woman actively engaged in philanthropy, driven by a sense of responsibility and emotional satisfaction. The deconstruction of their words reveals the complex interplay of gender norms, societal expectations, and individual agency, prompting the study of the trade-offs between conformity and empowerment within the cultural and historical contexts of India.

While the deconstruction of characters in Rohinton Mistry's works provides a lens into the diverse experiences of the Parsee community in India, it's essential to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity and

personal viewpoints embedded in his narratives. Mistry's portrayal, particularly of characters like Gustad Noble, might be criticized for potentially perpetuating a stereotype of vulnerability within the Parsee community. The clear dichotomies presented, such as contrasting the vulnerable Gustad with the resilient Nusli Wadia or the constrained Dina Dalal with the empowered Parmeshwar Godrej, oversimplify the intricate realities of Parsee's lives.

The portrayal of Nariman Vakeel by Rohinton Mistry depicts him as a victim of racial prejudice and extremism within Indian society, highlighting the challenges faced by Parsees. The language used emphasizes the dangers associated with such ideologies and draws intertextual references to broader cultural and historical contexts. In contrast, Ratan Tata is presented as a powerful and committed individual, contributing significantly to Indian society through a 125-year legacy of philanthropy. Unlike Nariman, Tata is not depicted as succumbing to prejudice, embodying an ideal image of social responsibility. Together, these contrasting depictions provide an understanding of the Parsee community's experiences in India's socio-cultural landscape.

The Relevance

The literary deconstruction allows for a symbolic examination of broader cultural and historical contexts, shedding light on societal paradoxes (Sahu et al. 98-100). The deconstruction of fictional characters, such as Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal and Nariman Vakeel in Rohinton Mistry's works, and non-fictional figures like Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata, serve as literary and analytical tools for understanding complex societal dynamics. In the context of Mistry's portrayal of Parsee characters, there is a means to illuminate the challenges faced by the Parsee community in India, offering a nuanced exploration of racial prejudice and extremist ideologies. On the other hand, through the deconstruction of real-life figures like Nusli Wadia, Parmeshwar Godrej and Ratan Tata, this research paper aims to offer insights into the actual impact of these Parsee individuals on Indian society. Their choices and legacy in

philanthropy, serve as a tangible example of social responsibility and long-term commitment to Indian socio-economic status.

As a result, the questions related to the depiction of powerless Parsees in India by Mistry are matters of deeper investigation and critical evaluation.

Conclusion

The deconstructive analysis seeks not merely to reverse but to restructure the opposition, particularly the prevalent notion that writing is secondary or derivative of any narrative. Following this thread, the examination of Rohinton Mistry's fictional Parsee characters and their power dynamics compared to real-life Parsee individuals in India has been scrutinized through the intersection of literature and social realities. It has been identified that Mistry delved into the struggles and powerlessness experienced by characters in his narratives, and presented critical justifications of being Parsee as the root of their challenges. Conversely, real-life Parsee figures are recognized for their influence and success across diverse fields.

Conclusively, this study suggests that readers, when engaging with Rohinton Mistry's narratives, should carefully consider the information presented. Mistry conveys significant ideas, but it is crucial to recognize that his storytelling may be influenced by his personal feelings and opinions. Comparing it to examining a painting from various viewpoints for a fuller understanding, it is essential to approach the stories with an awareness of potential biases. The message is that readers should reflect on diverse perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Parsee community's experiences in India as portrayed by Mistry.

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