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**FAITH— THE UMBILICAL CORD BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY IN  
THE FICTION OF ROHINTON MISTRY**

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**Abstract**

In this harsh and bitter world where intolerance of ideas and beliefs has become the call of the day, Rohinton Mistry is one such writer who is trying to find sanity in an insane world. The only thread he can find to hang upon is his undying “faith”. It is his faith, in the innate goodness of humanity and his firm belief in the commandment preached by every religion that the forces of good always triumph over the forces of evil that is evident in all his works, that gives his strength to surge forward in this quagmire of the world. Despite all odds, they are able to go on keeping their faith alive whether in their religious beliefs, political beliefs or any other. This is one point of dissimilarity between Mistry and other postmodern writers who have deliberately given up the hope of human salvation through faith. Also, some traits of the absurd philosophy and existentialism can be traced in the fiction of Mistry where all the characters seem more or less incapable at the hands of Destiny. Still, they are not disheartened and derive the momentum to go on from their faith that acts as the umbilical cord between man and God and provides them spiritual nourishment.

**Keywords-** Postmodernism, absurdism, existentialism, faith, intolerance

*Is the drink bitter life pours in your cup?  
 Is the taste gall?  
 Then smile and look up  
 And say 'God is with me whatever befall',  
 And keep trusting.  
 Is the heart heavy with hope long deferred,  
 And with prayers that seem vain?  
 Keep saying the word—  
 And that which you strive for you yet shall attain.  
 Keep praying.*

***Ella Wheeler Wilcox***

A rather unique characteristic feature of postmodern society is the idea that, as the potential number of possible choices relating to our behaviour, identity and so forth increases, so too does the need to make decisions— and when we are forced to make decisions the likelihood for uncertainty over whether we have made the "correct" choices also increases. In other words, postmodern society is characterized by both choice and uncertainty about our place in the world. On the one hand, people are freed from many of the "traditional constraints" that inhibited their behaviour whilst, on the other, this gives rise to a new postmodern condition of uncertainty about how people should be expected to behave in the various roles they choose or are forced to play. Peter Morey believes that the Zoroastrian faith acts as the binding force and provides the "philosophical mortar with which the lives and choices of many of Mistry's characters are bound together." (6) Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion with a complex history, and is believed to have been founded about five centuries before the Common Era. It is considered to be the world's first monotheistic religion founded in the reign of Cyrus the Great, by Zarathushtra and his own words are recorded in the *Gathas* or songs, of which only fragments are available today. Zarathushtra preached that a battle between good and evil, between the High God Ahura Mazda and the evil Ahriman was being carried out on Earth. The religion is based on the fundamental principle which is recorded in the Gathas that, there is one God, Ahura Mazda, who represents truth and cosmic order, and guides the world through his powers. Ahura Mazda created twin spirits, Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, the good and the bad, and gave each person the

freedom to choose between them. (Dalal, 2010) A person has to choose rightly and thus help God in creating a perfect world. Later texts laid importance on the concept of ‘purity of the mind’ and also on the ‘purity of fire’ and therefore dead bodies should not be burnt. Dead bodies instead of being disposed through fire are placed in the Towers of Silence where every inch of flesh is stripped from the bones by vultures, a practice condemned by both traditionalists and modernists alike. This practice is based on the principle that none of the natural elements, water, fire, earth and air, are violated. But both the earlier and later texts lay maximum importance to the initial preaching of Ahura Mazda that the good and the evil forces are involved in a constant battle and in the end good will triumph. This is evident from the final words offered by a Zoroaster in his prayers:

And then may we be those who transfigure this world. O Mazda (and you other) Lords,  
be present to me with support and truth.

Amen. (Willis, 470)

Emphasis on the purity of mind, thoughts and deeds has been laid in the Zend Avesta. Zarathustra is thus instructed by Ahura Mazda, “Purity is for man, next to life, the greatest good, that purity, O Zarathustra, that is in the Religion of Mazda for him who cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words, and deeds.” (Wilson, 85) On various occasions, Mistry’s fiction is imbued with instances from ancient Zoroastrian faith and many scenes take place in the Zoroastrian places of faith including the Atash Bahram or the Fire Temple, the Agiyari, the Towers of Silence and many important festivals and days considered sacred such as Behramroje, Khordad Saal, navjote ceremony, etc are described in detail. Often there are long digressions in the narrative where paragraph after paragraph is dedicated to ancient Persian history, its kings and Monarchs, the stories related to the Prophets and other feats related to their God, Ahura Mazda. Some critics believe that Mistry’s fiction is mostly influenced by the first book and “perhaps the key text in the Indian Parsis’ consciousness of tradition”, *Shah-Namah* or *The Book of Kings* by Firdausi. Most of the themes taken up by Mistry including family squabbles and generational conflicts are what forms the basis of Firdausi’s *Shah Namah*. Peter Morey is of the opinion that

Such interests also form the core of Mistry’s examination of how men and women behave in various affiliative units with which they are involved. Moreover, not only is the *Shah-Namah*, like Mistry’s work, concerned with what the Persian scholar Amin Banani has

described as ‘the tyranny of Time and the paradox of human existence’, it also develops from an initial representation of the struggles of good versus evil... (16-17)

Mistry’s fiction is replete with the eternal problem of good versus evil and all his characters are found to be involved in this perennial struggle. Though, for them, it becomes slightly difficult to preserve their moral purity; their faith in the prevalence of good remains unshaken. Most of his characters, at times, seem to be utterly helpless in the action of their existence— Gustad Noble, Dina Dalal, Om, Ishvar, Nariman Vakeel, Yezad Chenoy, Sarosh the Squatter, Percy Boyce, Jehangir Bulsara and many others— they appear to be mere puppets in the hands of their fate. It is their faith that sees them through troubled times and they are able to hold on to their existence. Mehroo’s world in ‘Auspicious Occasion’ bears no charm for her with her daily rituals of household work made unbearable by Rustomji’s constant grumbling and complaining about his constipated bowels. Yet in this maddening world, one thing that gives her the strength to remain calm and dutiful is her devotion to her faith. She receives immense comfort in the sanctity of the fire temple. In fact, she looks forward to her visits to the fire temple. This faith sprang from her childhood visits when she adored going there. She loved the tranquility, the fragrance, the “mystical” rituals performed by the priests, the sanctum sanctorum with marble floor and marble walls and the sacred fire burning in a silver *afargaan*. Everything about the fire temple enchanted her.

She felt she could sit for hours outside the sanctuary, watching the flames in their dance of life, seeing the sparks fly up the enormous dark dome resembling the sky. It was her own private key to the universe, somehow making less frightening the notions of eternity and infinity. (TFB, 15)

With *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry’s attempt to revive man’s faith in his religion, attains greater height. Despite all odds, Gustad Noble’s faith in his religion remains unshaken and firm. The fight between good and evil is the main concern of the novel along with man’s futile struggle to etch out his own destiny without realizing that he is a helpless pawn in the chaotic scheme of things. Gustad is a fatalist who considers himself an instrument in the hands of all powerful destiny which, he believed, plays hide and seek with man. His resilience to fight against his destiny gives him strength and he looks forward to fulfill his dreams through his children. When the novel opens, Gustad’s sole purpose of life is to see his son, Sohrab clear his entrance exam to IIT. His early morning prayers end with a wish for his son to succeed. Gustad suffered a limp in one of his legs while saving Sohrab from a moving bus. His limp, every moment of the day,

reminds him that his loss would be recovered through Sohrab's success in IIT. His plans, to establish his status in the Parsi community through his son's success, are thwarted with Sohrab's denial to take admission despite clearing his entrance exam. In that one moment, destiny prevails over Gustad's efforts. Sohrab's admission to IIT was one of his cherished ambitions. The insolence and defiance of his son hurt him most. For him,

... the Indian Institute of Technology became the 'promised land'. It was El Dorado and Shangri-La, it was Atlantis and Camelot, it was Xanadu and Oz. It was the home of the Holy Grail. And all things would be given and all things would be possible and all things would come to pass for he who journeyed there and emerged with the sacred chalice. (SLJ, 66-67)

Gustad's hardships do not end with Sohrab's rejection of his father's life-long dream. A notice from the Municipality announces a proposal to demolish the 300 feet compound wall that offers a protective shield to their building from the rest of the city. Almost simultaneously Gustad's daughter Roshan develops chronic dysentery and the frequent visits to Dr Paymaster's clinic in the red-light locality of the House of Cages, drills a hole in his pocket. All these hardships and ill-fate are unable to sway Gustad in his devotion to his faith and he prays to God to grant him peace and calm. These problems represent Gustad's physical hardships but these are accompanied with spiritual hardships, too. Gustad's acceptance to receive and deposit Bilimoria's money is a spiritual suffering for him that attains its calm on Gustad's attending the funerals of, first his friend and colleague, Dinshawji and later of Major Bilimoria.

The title of the novel also suggests its protagonist's physical and spiritual journey and his spiritual progress that enriches his experiences and broadens his sensibility towards humanity. His journey in the novel is compared to the journey of the Magi who also underwent both physical and spiritual sufferings as is evident from Eliot's poem 'The Journey of the Magi' where the lines 'A cold coming we had of it,/ Just the worst time of the year/ For a journey... The ways deep and the weather sharp,/ The very dead of winter' refer to the physical hardships of the magi.

But the conflict in their mind when they could not get themselves adjusted to the old ways of life after gaining the new experience refers to their spiritual suffering. 'I had seen birth and death,/ But had thought they were different; this Birth was/ Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.' (Halдар, 148)

Gustad's innumerable sufferings burden his life, yet ironically, it is death that releases Gustad from the yoke of suffering. Dinshawji's death is a personal and great loss to Gustad. He feels an inexplicable bond between him and Dinshawji and accompanying his dead body to the Towers and attending his funeral prayers gives solace to his tormented soul. Silently, he attends all the rituals from the washing of the dead body to placing it on the marble platform and the lighting of incense. He is accompanied by Dinshawji's wife, Alamai and her nephew, Nusli but it is Gustad's faith that makes him forget everyone and everything around him. "The prayers filled the dark room slowly. Slowly, the prayer sound was the dark room. And before he was aware of it, Gustad was under its gentle spell. He forgot the time, forgot Alamai, forgot Nusli." (247) Major Bilimoria's death, too, is a personal loss for Gustad who considered the RAW agent not only a friend but also an elder brother. But this time, he is a detached observer of all activities performed during the funeral. His place, this time, is taken by Ghulam Mohammed, friend and colleague of Major Bilimoria. Mistry presents Ghulam Mohammed as the mouthpiece of all those who despite their firm belief in their own religion show equal reverence to others' religion. He arranges for the Major's funeral in traditional Parsi manner at the Doongerwadi but his feelings are hurt when he is not allowed to attend the funeral and he tells Gustad with tears in his eyes, "Your Parsi priests don't allow outsiders like me to go inside." (322) Ghulam's secularism is also reflected in Gustad and the pavement artist who draws pictures of gods and goddesses from all religions of the world. The pavement artist has a BA in world religion but being a philosopher, who understands the transience and impermanence of human existence instead of adopting a permanent resident and profession, prefers to live on the pavement and earn his livelihood by drawing pictures of deities on the pavement. The pavement artist's respect for everyone's faith is echoed in his following words:

'...I don't like to weaken anyone's faith. Miracle, magic, mechanical trick, coincidence- does it matter what it is, as long as it helps? Why analyse the strength of the imagination, the power of suggestion, power of auto-suggestion, the potency of psychological pressures? Looking too closely is destructive, makes everything disintegrate. As it is, life is difficult enough. Why to make it tougher? After all, who is to say what makes a miracle and what makes a coincidence?' (289)

Though Gustad's faith teaches him monotheism, it is for the sake of his children, he visits the church of Mount Mary along with his college friend Malcolm Saldanah. Malcolm asserts his faith in the miraculous power of the Virgin Mary and tells Gustad about the church's tradition of

welcoming people of all religions regardless of caste or creed. Gustad realizes that in old times he would have dismissed the idea as outrageous but now he was concerned about the well-being of his family and was ready to accept such beliefs. He felt, “Dabbling in religions was distasteful and irreverent, an affront to the other faith and his own.” Malcolm’s explanations of the Mother’s miraculous healing powers appear ridiculous and his account of offering the wax-made body parts to treat the diseased part is equally outrageous, yet Gustad places his faith in the holy influence of the deity for his children.

Apart from religious faith, Mistry also highlights faith in other things that restore man’s conviction to fight evil in this dreary world. Gustad’s and Major Bilimoria’s trust in Madhiwalla Bonesetter’s healing power as an alternative treatment is an act of faith. Gustad never forgets that if it had not been for Madhiwalla’s treatment, he would have never been able to walk without crutches or a walking stick. Similarly, Mistry does not show any irreverence towards Mr Rabadi’s faith in Dustoorji Baria’s miraculous tendencies. Mr Rabadi believes Dustoorji Baria to be a holy man and that he “Does lots of miracles to help the sick and suffering” and “not just restricted to spiritual problems, because the philosophy of Zoroastrian religion encourages material and spiritual success.” (288) Miss Kutpitia’s faith in black magic as a method to treat physical and spiritual suffering is also an outlet of her suppressed grief. Mistry does not challenge her faith because the woman has suffered a lot in her life and hence her aloofness from her neighbours and her mysterious ways become natural to her. Mistry’s philosophy appears quite lucidly in the novel, which is, that man needs religion and faith, not necessarily in God, to sustain his meaningless existence on this earth. Gustad’s final surrender, to his faith and God, occurs when he carries Tehmul’s dead body to his room and offers prayers by reciting the Yatha AhuVaryo, five times, and AshemVahoo, three times. While reciting these prayers he is unable to control his tears that he had not shed for a long time. He cried “as much for himself as for Tehmul. As much for Tehmul as for Jimmy. And for Dinshawji, for Pappa and Mamma, for Grandpa and Grandma, all who had had to wait for so long...” (337)

In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry creates a fictional world far from perfect. It is a world which is rampant with war, corruption, hypocrisy, communalism, hatred, ugliness, superstition, knavery, wickedness and degradation of human beings. He, at times, emerges as a social realist who presents the society as it is with all its sores yet through his ideology he tries to project the kind of society he wants to be a part of. Despite all the misery around, the writer believes in the larger rhythm of life where misery and happiness are inter-woven and work incessantly towards the

development of the central character to a climax and it is his faith in the prevalence of good over evil from which he draws his strength to fight these corrupt forces of the society.

...in all seriousness, through his fiction, Mistry has promoted allegiance to the faith. The Zoroastrians believe that the world has two prevailing forces, i.e. the good and the bad and in the fight between good and the bad, ultimately good forces will emerge winner. *Such a Long Journey* is an example of this religious philosophy in which, the protagonist, Gustad Noble is shown to fight these forces all through his life but at the end his reunion with his son, Sohrab, is the victory of his faith. (Sethi, 844)

*A Fine Balance*, once again, brings forward Mistry's quintessential theme of good versus evil. The social and political forces along with fate are all out to destroy the four main characters in the novel. The novel is different from Mistry's previous novel in that, his earlier novel showed man's faith in his religion but this novel highlights the faith of the main characters in their own individuality. They are in a constant struggle with their destiny and despite all odds want to make the world a better place for them to live in. Dina Dalal, though born and brought up in a traditional Parsi household, does not share her community's unswerving faith. She is a sceptic and challenges the norms of the society without much contemplation of the consequence. While Dina's mother attained peace on her monthly visit to the fire temple and to hear the elderly Dustoor Framji's soothing tones of prayer for her husband's soul, Dina was always skeptical about these visits. The reason for her cynicism could not be attributed to her lack of faith but to the unctuous behaviour of the Dustoor who was notorious for his probing and squeezing with the girls. Mistry's ironic comments on priests of Dustoor Framji's ilk, shows his concern on falling moral and spiritual standards. These impressions of the priests made Dina a less frequent visitor to the fire temple and in the later chapters of the novel, except for her wedding ceremony which was performed at the same fire temple where prayers for both her parents were performed, Dina is never shown to visit the fire temple. Nor is she shown to offer prayers or indulge in any sort of religious ritual. In fact, her fiercely independent nature, her will to survive on her own without any male support in her life, her decision never to remarry, indicate that she has greater faith in her own inner strength than on any worldly God or priest.

The other two characters— Om and Ishvar—are also presented in the same light. They are not shown to visit temple, offer prayers or bow before any God or Goddess. Their village by the river is an orthodox Hindu dominated village where to read sacred texts and visit the temple, is

the prerogative of the upper caste Brahmins and Thakurs. Once again, in this part of the novel, Mistry is quick to highlight that the ones who preach religion and morality are the least religious or moral in their attitude. Dukhimochi's conversation with Pandit Lalluram is an example of the short-sightedness of the so called learned Pandit. He recites shlokas and quotes extensively from the sacred texts without understanding its true meaning. Mistry wants to show in the novel that those who talk about religion or faith are least faithful and the poor and the downtrodden still show humanity to their fellow human beings and are, therefore, faithful. During Hindu-Muslim riots in the wake of India's partition, Narayan and Ishvar, sons of Dukhimochi, save Ashraf tailor, the Muslim friend of their father, from the Hindu fanatics by hiding them and claiming to be the owners of the shop. Their faith in human values remains stable when others had lost it. Om and Ishvar, after initial doubts on Dina's intentions, develop a strong faith in her and she, too, puts her faith in them. Together, they feel they will be able to overcome all their hardships. Though their happiness is short lived, their faith in each other remains firm and strong and we see them still enjoying moments of togetherness at the end of the novel. Maneck Kohlah is the fourth character who lived with Dina in her flat as a paying guest. During Dina's initial apprehension of the tailors, she forbids Maneck, 'a nice Parsi boy' from socializing with them. But later a strong bond of humanity and faith in each other develops between all four of them. Maneck leaves for Dubai to join a company. When he returns to the city, eight years later, he is shattered to know the fate of Dina aunty and the two tailors. For him, it is the last proof to realize the chaotic state of the world. He remembers the patchwork quilt that Dina used to make with the left over pieces of cloth and tries to define God in the following words:

I prefer to think that God is a giant quiltmaker. With an infinite variety of designs. And the quilt has grown so big and confusing, the pattern is impossible to see, the squares and diamonds and triangles don't fit so well together anymore, it's all become meaningless. So He has abandoned it. (418)

Once again, the futility of human existence confronts the reader and the act of Maneck throwing himself in front of a moving train is a statement of despair and a manifestation of the existential anguish evident in most of Mistry's fiction. Here, Mistry shows a contrast of attitudes between Maneck and Ishvar, the tailor. When Dina is not satisfied with a few pieces of her patchwork quilt, Ishvar reassures her by saying, "Calling one piece sad is meaningless. See, it is connected to a happy piece... So that's the rule to remember. The whole quilt is more important than any single square." (568) Mistry's realist attitude is reflected through Ishvar's words that does not

see the world in black or white. One should accept both the negative and positive aspects of life and piece these happy and sad pieces together in a way that does not compromise one's principles. Only then it is possible for man to be happy as then only he would be able to attain this delicate balance between hope and despair. Apart from the unfinished patchwork quilt, another image that becomes a metaphor in the novel is that of the chessboard given to Maneck by his roommate Avinash. Avinash meets a tragic end and so do his sisters who commit suicide. This chessboard becomes a metaphor for existence, a game that nobody wins at. Nandini Bhautoo is of the opinion that, "the game becomes the reality and all lose out on the small hopes, dreams and struggles of their lives." (Bhautoo, 34)

According to the dictionary 'faith' has two basic meanings— first, it is complete confidence in a person or plan; and the second— a strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny. These basic meanings signify the ultimate trust and genuine belief that something good is eventually going to happen to make all well, regardless of the circumstances and situations that may be present. Mistry's novel, *Family Matters* is the story of faith in the goodness of humanity despite so many socio-political upheavals in the society. The novel once again brings to light the constant struggle between the good and the evil forces of the universe and the ultimate prevalence of truth and the victory of good over evil. Also, at the heart of the novel lies a highly spiritual philosophy— religion and faith, if understood properly, in a positive light can act as a binding force for man and in turn humanity, but if not understood properly, it can lead to religious fundamentalism, that can sow the seeds of discord, thereby ruining the man, his family and at a macroscopic level can destroy nations and races, too.

Nariman Vakeel's life becomes a hell due to the religious fundamentalism of his parents who are unable to accommodate a non-Parsi girl as their daughter-in-law despite Nari's commitment to her. His father's fanatic zeal is expressed in his epistolary communication with his neighbour, Mr Arjani. Zeal when becomes passion can lead to unnecessary squabbles and destroys peace of mind of the individual. Mr Vakeel's letter to the editor of *Jam-e-Jamshed*, leads him into a controversial law suit with his neighbour, Mr Arjani, who refuses to give in to Mr Vakeel's fundamental approach towards Parsi religion. In order to assert his religious beliefs, he destroys the life of his one and only son, Nariman, by marrying him to a Parsi widow and from that day on Nari never had a day in his life when his peace of mind is not disturbed. Lucy, his Catholic girlfriend refuses to accept his alienation; his wife Yasmin nags him for still seeing his ex-girlfriend, even though on humanitarian grounds. Coomy, Yasmin's daughter from previous

marriage, hates her step-father and holds him responsible for her mother's death. Now, in his old age, she still nurtures this hatred and wants to get rid of him by any means. Nari, who has never deliberately or intentionally hurt anyone, is grieved at Coomy's insensitive behaviour towards him. Suffering from Parkinsonism, he fractures his hip during a walk in the neighbourhood. Coomy, finding this as a god-sent opportunity sends Nari to her younger sister's house, citing reason of repairs needed by the house that can be undertaken only in Nari's absence. Though, Coomy cannot be held responsible for her vicious behaviour, she has to pay for her selfishness. The ceiling, whose repair had been an excuse for throwing Nari out of the house, falls on her head and she is crushed under it. Thus, the message conveyed by the writer is clear—evil hath its end.

Nari, whose faith in humanity remains unshaken, is treated kindly and tenderly by his younger daughter Roxana, her husband Yezad and his grandchildren. The only character, whose positivism changes into negativism during the course of the novel is, Yezad. Yezad's faith in the general goodness encompasses the tolerance of other men's faith, yields to the bigot in him. Yezad's friendship with Vilas Rane is his faith in the secular forces and in general, humanity. Vilas Rane has a firm faith in the healing power of his words and he utilizes this power in helping the uneducated around him. He writes letters for the migrant workers at a reasonable price of three rupees per page but it is less a profession for him and more a service of humanity. By writing letters, he shares the sorrow and grief of these illiterate people. He tells Yezad, "it gives me so many readymade families. I share their lives, like an uncle or grandfather who knows everything about everyone." (142) Writing letters gives solace to Vilas and it is his faith in the therapeutic power of his letters that gives him satisfaction.

Mr Vikram Kapur, the owner of the Sports shop, is another character who shares Yezad's secular feelings. His family had migrated to Bombay during the partition riots from Punjab and since Bombay had given them space to live and prosper, he felt obliged to the city. He compares the adoption of the city to the adoption of a new religion. He says, "It's the difference between being born into a religion and converting to it... The convert takes nothing for granted. He chooses, thus his commitment is superior." (152) Often Yezad wondered if Kapur's passion for the city "verged on the fanatical." Mr Kapur's narration of the incident involving a young man who did not give up his chase of the local train while it left the platform makes his faith all the more strong in the magnanimity of human nature. The way people in the train lifted the young man off the platform makes him comment, "Whose hands were they, and whose hands were they

grasping? Hindu, Muslim, Dalit, Parsi, Christian? No one knew and no one cared.” (160) His faith in Yezad and the honesty associated with the Parsi community helps in maintaining the moral values of his employee. Yezad turns down the proposal of one of the company’s clients to share the profit earned by cheating on the owner and at a crucial moment his conscience does not allow him to steal Mr Kapur’s money from the drawer left there for the Shiv Sena extortionists. Mr Kapur is also interested in standing as a candidate for the next Municipal elections for the sole aim of preserving the secular face of the city which is being spoiled by the ugliness arising out of the growth of Hindu fundamentalism being promoted by the Shiv Sena. Mr Kapur’s sympathetic attitude towards Husain, the peon, is also understandable for Husain lost his entire family in the wake of Hindu-Muslim riots caused by the demolition of Babri Masjid. Mr Kapur shares Husain’s loss and grief as a personal loss. But Mr Kapur’s faith in religious tolerance receives a blow when the Shiv Sainiks enter his shop and shoot him before the eyes of Husain, who is unable to save him.

Yezad Chenoy, one of the central protagonists of the novel, comes across as a jovial, open and decent human being and is portrayed as a secular rationalist who hates being over religious and fundamentalist. He is a family man who respects his father-in-law, loves his wife and children and is loyal to his boss. His views on religion are secular and he espouses a doctrine of universality and is irritated by the communal partiality. But it is his character that undergoes a tremendous change and a radical transformation among all the characters of Mistry’s fictional world. Yezad loses his job and turns to betting to make both the ends meet. His material disintegration haunts him and ultimately he finds solace through his visits to the fire temple. His wife, Roxana, initially rejoices at the return of his faith in the religion of his birth but her happiness is short lived. Yezad turns more and more to the fire temple for peace and solace where he also learns the gestures for praying which his long absence from the sacred place had obliterated from his memory. On losing his job, the solace of the fire temple becomes his sole achievement. In the later years which are presented through the eyes of Jehangir, Yezad has turned into a paranoid bigot, obsessed with ritual purity and following the dictates of religion to the letter. He torments Murad for having a non-Parsi girlfriend and has become so intolerant towards other religions that he cannot even tolerate the photographs of gods of other religions in his house. Nandini Bhautoo argues,

By tracing the various changes in Yezad, it is possible to read a complex argument about secularism and religion. Yezad’s secularism, though admirable, does not cater to his inner

spiritual yearnings. However, once they are assuaged by the deep emotional experience inside the temple, there is the danger of a complete submission to rituals. Yezad turns to that most problematic and controversial aspect of Indian public space- organized religion- for comfort. (Bhautoo, 91)

*The Scream* has no direct references to either the religion or the community. It is about the faith of the old man in his conviction about the scream of a man he heard in the night. He tries to convince his family members of the heart-rending scream but they out rightly reject his assertion as a fictional element of the mind of a senile man suffering from Parkinsonism. The old man, at the same time, is worried about the falling standards of morality and values of the people around him. He ridicules the Prime Minister's faith in the astrologer living in the building opposite to the old man's. Mistry's satire on the Prime Minister consulting the astrologer about a "favourable time for introducing new legislation or an auspicious month for holding general elections" forms a part of magic realism of his narrative technique.

It becomes evident from the above discussion about faith and religion that ever since man became a social being, his utmost priority has been the well being of his own self as well as that of his loved ones. This resulted in his belief in some supernatural force, unnamed, unidentified yet a source of perennial strength. Another reason for man's belief in the supernatural force that he calls God is beautifully put together by Karen Armstrong in her contemplative work *The History of God*. According to her, "Human beings cannot endure emptiness and desolation; they will fill the vacuum by creating a new focus of meaning." (Armstrong, 468) Mistry's fictional world is replete with characters whose basic need for religion is to safeguard the interests of their family and loved ones and to ward off their inner loneliness as well as to ward off their spiritual barrenness. Gustad Noble's prayers are full of wishes for his children and friends. Yezad's loneliness caused by the disintegration of his material world takes him into the fire temple and the void in Dina's life is filled by her faith in the general righteousness of human beings. For all these characters life is a constant strife where it is not essential that the good forces are bound to succeed. Still their faith binds them in an incommunicable bond with their fellow human beings and it is faith alone that gives them the might to face the destructive forces around them. Hence, in this utterly chaotic world where man's existence is meaningless bordering on absurdity, it is his faith and his devotion to his religion that makes some sense of the human predicament. Therefore, religion like art is an attempt to find meaning and value in life; and, like art, religion was propitiated to express a sense of wonder and mystery that surrounds this beautiful yet

frightening world. It is Mistry's faith and devotion to the secular religion of Humanity that is reflected through his works and that raises the stature of his art to that of religion. Faith, for him, is the binding force.

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