

## **Multiculturalism in the Works of Rohinton Mistry and Alice**

**Munro**

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### **Abstract**

“Multiculturalism describes the existence, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultural traditions within a single jurisdiction, usually considered in terms of the culture associated with an ethnic group. This can happen when a jurisdiction is created or expanded by amalgamating areas with two or more different cultures (eg- French Canada and English Canada ) or through immigration from different jurisdictions around the world (eg- Australia, United States, United Kingdom and many other countries.)

Multicultural ideologies and policies vary widely, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect through the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group to which they belong.”

We always attempt to homogenize a culture and impose an identity on it because we are aware that every culture is internally plural and differentiated. We understand that all cultures are born out of interaction and are shaped by wider economic, political and other forces. This negates the very basis of Afro centrism, Euro centrism, Indocentrism and other kinds of centrism’s, all of which isolate the history of the culture from others and credit its achievements to its own genius. From a multiculturalists’ perspective, no political ideology can represent the full truth of human life. Each of them – liberalism, conservatism, socialism, or nationalism- is embedded in a particular culture, represents a particular vision of the good life and is narrow and partial. Liberalism is the example of an inspiring political doctrine giving stress on great values of human dignity, autonomy, liberty, critical thought and

equality. However, they can be defined in several ways of which the liberal is the only one and not always the most coherent.

Rohinton Mistry's style is complex and direct as is seen in his short story collection 'Tales from Firozsha Baag.' He has employed a combination of simplicity and sophistication to analyse a character like Kersi who comes to term with social and political circumstances which forces him to come face to face with strange questions about morality and personal responsibilities. 'Tales from Firozsha Baag' consists of questions of belonging, migration and identity which are the essential qualities of multiculturalism which Mistry has carried with him to Canada. Despite living in Canada since 1975, Mistry's fiction is embedded with the spirit of Bombay. Bombay is not merely a location. It can be described as a home in which characters live, breathe and grapple with their spiritual and material demons. Munro on the other hand describes the rural Canada and its people in a colourful manner. Her stories are written in Gothic style presenting the mundane lives of people in an interesting way. Her heroines are the protagonists of her stories describing their romantic and sexual encounters. They also try to break away from their ordinary life in order to achieve something in life. Thus, we can say that both Mistry and Munro dealt with multiculturalism in an effective manner and so we can relate ourselves with their stories.

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[<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism.Web.Page1>]

A very insightful analysis of multiculturalism has been done by Bhikhu Parekh from whose essay I quote: "The early 1970s marked the emergence of the multicultural movement first in Canada and Australia and then in the U. S. A., U.K., Germany and in other places. Since the

multicultural movement sprang up unplanned in many different political contexts, it has attracted a diverse culture of groups and has so far failed to make a coherent philosophical statement and so lacks a clear focus and identity.

Multiculturalism is best understood neither as a political doctrine nor a school of philosophy with a distinct theory of a man's place in the world but as a way of viewing human life. It advocates some principles which are needed to be carefully reformulated so that it can stay alive. It is believed that human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance. This does not mean that they are determined by culture and are unable to critically evaluate its value but rather view the world from within a culture whether inherited or consciously adopted.

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It also marginalizes values as human solidarity, a sense of rootedness, selflessness, humility and contentment. Since it gives meaning to only some aspects of the most complex human existence and misses out on what gives value to life, any political doctrine whether liberalism or socialism cannot provide the sole foundation of a good society. Political doctrines structure political life and do not offer a comprehensive philosophy of life. Regarding political life, it needs to be interpreted and defined in the light of the wider culture, unique history and political circumstances of the concerned community.

A multicultural society cannot be stable and last long without developing a common sense of belonging among its citizens. The sense of belonging cannot be ethnic and based on shared

cultural, ethnic and other characteristics because a multicultural society is too diverse for that, but must be political and based on a shared commitment or belonging is reciprocal in nature. The political community cannot expect its members to develop a sense of belonging to it unless it belongs to them. It must, therefore, value and cherish them all equally and reflect this in its structure, policies and its conduct of public affairs. This involves granting them equal rights of citizenship, a decent standard of living and the opportunity to develop themselves and participate to make their respective contribution to collective life. In a multicultural society, different communities have different means and some might be disadvantaged or lack the skill and the confidence to participate in the mainstream society and avail of its opportunities. The need to inculcate a common sense of belonging and justice require such measures as group- differentiated rights, culturally differentiated applications of laws and policies, state support for minority institutions and a judicious programme of affirmative action.

There is a formidable theoretical and political task and no multicultural society has so far succeeded in tackling it. The erstwhile Soviet Union and Yugoslavia failed because they lacked imagination and wisdom. Thanks to the wisdom of the founding fathers, and the judicious balance between unity and diversity embodied in the Indian Constitution, India has managed to persist for six decades as a territorially intact and moderately successful polity.

Multicultural societies are new to our age and throw up political problems that have no parallel in history. The political theories, institutions, vocabulary, virtues and skills that we have developed are of limited help and sometimes even, a positive handicap, in dealing with multicultural society. The latter need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving political unity without cultural uniformity and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences.”

[Bhikhu Parekh.<http://www.india-seminar.com>.1999.Web. Page484]

Salman Rushdie once said, “It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back we must do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely that thing

that was lost, that we will, in short, create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.”

[Salman Rushdie. Imaginary Homelands. 1999. Print. Page10. ]

An in-depth analysis of Rohinton Mistry has been done by Peter Morey from whose essay I quote:

“ At the end of the short story, ‘Swimming Lessons’, the narrator, a young author, observes an old man in his Toronto apartment block staring silently at the flakes of snow falling outside. He contemplates:

“What thoughts is he thinking as he watches them? Of childhood days, perhaps, and snowmen with hats and pipes, and snowball fights, and white Christmases, and Christmas trees? What will I think of, old in this country, when I sit and watch the snow come down?... my snowmen and snowball fights and Christmas trees are in the pages of Enid Blyton’s books dispersed amidst the adventures of the Famous Five, and the Five Find-Outers, and the Secret Seven. My snowflakes are even less forgettable than the old man’s, for they never melt.””

[Rohinton Mistry. Tales from Firozsha Baag. 1987. Print. Page244.]

This evocative passage captures the imagination of the exile, forged in a single culture but obliged to deal in language with the everyday realities of another. It is reflected in the position of the author, Rohinton Mistry, born in Bombay, now residing in Canada, but searching continuously for the long lost remains of the India he has left behind. The last sentence suggests an increase in the production of powerful images of the childhood experiences distanced by pace and time. Mistry’s work with its repeated image of journeys of various kinds, the experiences and traditions of faraway places, which a much-travelled person brings home, with the traditions of the past as it reveals itself to the natives of a place.

Rohinton Mistry was born into the Parsee community of Bombay on 3rd July 1952. His father was an advertising account executive and he has memories of his mother, happy as a nurturer and able to do the miracle that all mothers perform and that was hardly enough to like abundance. Since the author did not have new clothes and shoes frequently, still he was satisfied. His mother became the model for his female characters who used their domestic capacities to keep households intact and children fed, notwithstanding the impulsive and often destructive behaviour of their husbands.

Being a part of a minority community in India who migrated to Canada, Mistry offers a unique perspective on the multiple view point involved in the construction of identities. Identity is an important theme in his work which is seen in both personal and national terms. His writing provides tragic perspective on the post colonial India. Mistry's writings are seen to interrogate 'the national' as a signifier of identity on a number of levels. His 'Canadianness', and the setting of a few stories in 'Tales from Firozsha Baag,' makes him a chronicler of the experience of migrancy and situate him with the hesitant and contradictory project of Canadian multiculturalism.

Mistry's text are governed by a hybridity that operates on three levels: the hybridity of an Iranian culture transported via India, to Canada, and the changes it has picked up, hybridity in terms of relationship of Parsees to western cultural values, education of the author and the European literary influences found in his writings and a number of possible readings related to western tradition in the context of Indian literature both in English and other languages concerning the modern dilemmas surrounding his characters. Mistry's characters often personify the position of the Parsee community as they tend to be marginal figures living in poor circumstances with a mentality of a servant, they are conscious of their difference from others which often comes out their snobbery or prejudice. They are made aware that the need of the hour is to take a moral position, but they know that this may have limited or no impact as they understand that they are not powerful against political and social forces.

Recently, the notion of a global tradition has become synonymous with Diaspora writing. Diaspora consists of several categories of displaced persons as well as numerous ethnic and religious groups. A diasporic author searches for some new order and some pattern to make sense of his unfamiliar new surroundings. Mistry's writing is full of this search for pattern in the chaos of a dislocated life. Kersi frantically searches for a way of ordering and giving shape to his experiences and those of his brother Percy and his school friend Jamshed in 'Lend Me Your Light', while Nariman Hansotia's stylised and exaggerated story telling of Sarosh- Sid in 'Squatter' is a way of bringing out the experience of cultural dislocation.

There is double-ness at the heart of immigrant experience which Mistry's 'Tales from Firozsha Baag' admirably captures. In it, the protagonist copies Mistry's movement from the Parsee Community situated in Bombay to the unknown and not very friendly spaces of Canada. There is also a set of impulses at work, attraction to the new society, at the same time there is fear that if there is a total assimilation then the identity may be lost. This is

shown in 'Tales from Firozsha Baag' where a desire is there to belong to a new society and the need to hold the old one. Sometimes involuntary comes into play in Kersi in 'Lend Me Your Light' whose desire to settle in Canada is compromised by a need to refer to his experiences to the known and familiar structures and relationships of Bombay.

Regarding Rohinton Mistry's position in Canadian literature, his migrant status makes him representative of a number of new literary voices and ideas who changed the way of writing national literature. Critics have described the search for a Canadian identity as one of the thread of Canadian literary criticism in recent years. An attempt is being made to differentiate Canadian literature from English and American literature. The rise in the number of authors of different cultures gave a boost to the notion of plurality as important for writing in Canada today. Canada has become a popular destination for many authors coming from previously enslaved but now independent countries. The history of Canada is the history of immigration. All Canadians are immigrants who came from somewhere else like English and the French settlers joined by the Americans after the declaration of independence by the United States of America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and African Blacks who arrived as slaves for the auctions. The Famine left many Irish for opportunities in Canada along with Japanese and people of other countries. These experiences are given shape by Mistry in 'Tales from Firozsha Baag' and it is the latest move in the ongoing process of immigration.

There is something different about the manner in which such immigrants are viewed and talked about. This discrimination is based on their skin colour and cultural origin more than anything else. In order to eliminate such discrimination, Canada passed a Multiculturalism Act in July 1988. The purpose of the act was to protect and nurture the multicultural heritage about which the awareness of the Canadians has increased. It enshrined in law recognition of the positive mingling of cultures.

Mistry has voiced a degree of ambivalence about the value of the act sponsored by the state. He has a fear that it creates dead ends from where the ethnic community can neither participate nor can be assimilated in the Canadian life. Nariman Hansotia in the tale of emigration and cultural discomfort, 'Squatter', is more frank in his doubts:

"The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures- that's their favourite word, mosaic- instead of one uniform mix, like the American

melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner.”

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page160.]

In 1987, Rohinton Mistry’s first volume, a collection of short stories was published as *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. These stories include topics such as families and their internal disputes, a sense of entrapment and the desire for escape, memory and the pull of the past, the body, its function and inevitable decay, the search for balance in the midst of turbulence created by the elements of life and the redemptive power of storytelling. Many of these were to receive a detailed treatment in his latter works but they can be seen in the lives of the characters that live in this apartment block in Bombay. The author’s style is a subtle, sophisticated weaving of past and present enabling to explore the characters and their motives and the intricate tangle of cause and effect which helps to direct events on personal and national levels. Symbols do not remain at one place in the author’s writing. Places, water, music, the weather, cooking, sport, journeys and Bombay are shifting symbols as they appear and reappear within and across the texts.

The stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* describe events taking place in the 1960s during which the protagonist, Kersi Boyce- who is the narrator grows from youth to maturity. Thus the stories describe and enact the journey from Firozsha Baag to Canada. Each tale contains references to other characters and their experiences as we read. Characters such as Najamai, Rustomji- the – Curmudgeon and Jehangir Bulsara seem to stroll through each other’s stories as easily as they were strolling through the apartment blocks. If the stories of a semblance of a community, it is also able to bring into light the dark moments of the characters living in Firozsha Baag. We witness the tender and private memories of Daulat Mirza as she comes to terms with her husband’s death to observe the Parsee’s mourning ritual in ‘Condolence Visit’ or Sarosh- Sid’s anxiety in a foreign country in *Squatter*. The community is not celebrated either. Mistry makes fun of the excesses of Parsee exclusiveness in stories such as ‘Auspicious Occasion’ with the protagonist Rustomji humbled by an encounter with the India from which he has tried to cut himself off. The first three stories, ‘Auspicious Occasion’, ‘One Sunday’ and ‘The Ghost of Firozsha Baag’ deal with kinds of isolation from surrounding environments and are to do with vulnerability and outsider status. ‘Condolence Visit’, ‘The Collectors’ and ‘Of White Hairs and Cricket’ introduce the possibility of death and attempts to come to terms with change and laws, ‘The Paying Guests’ and ‘Squatter’

focus on belonging and the spaces which the protagonists would call home but for various reasons cannot and the final stories ‘Lend Me Your Light,’ ‘Exercisers’ and ‘Swimming Lessons’ interrogate the experiences of migration, exile, return and unsuccessful attempts at escape.”

[Peter Morey. Rohinton Mistry: Contemporary World Writers. Manchester University Press... 2004. Print. Pages 1-33. ]

‘Auspicious Occasion’ introduces us to the crumbling world of Firozsha Baag and one of its inhabitants Rustomji has been named ‘The Curmudgeon’ by Nariman Hansotia. It also introduces us to the tradition – bound world of Bombay’s Parsee community, as Rustomji and his wife Mehroo prepare for the Behram Roje Celebrations. Rustomji is 16 years her senior and already wearing dentures. He pretends indifference to the ceremonies, but secretly enjoys the display which such festivals allow, as he dons the ceremonial Parsee dress which marks him out as different from the predominantly Hindu India that surrounds him.

The story begins as the couple prepare for their visit to the fire temple. The rituals and superstitions surrounding this auspicious occasion- the concern that everything we just write and to avoid distractions- show the central problem faced by Parsees in the modern world: how to balance the requirement of tradition to keep up with modernity. The influence of the British on the Parsees is symbolised by Rustomji’s lament that Lifebuoy Soap and Johnnie Walker Scotch, the most valuable legacies of Britain are only available in black market. If Rustomji is living in the past, it also shows that the Baag has seen better days. The building is in a bad shape and needs renovation immediately. The upstairs toilet is leaking in a steady drip and much to Rustomji’s chagrin disturbs his morning motion. He is put into discomfort by the drops of water which fell on his head on a day which demands from the faithful a particular attention to purity. Putting aside the idea of using his arch enemy and neighbour Nariman’s lavatory we learn that:

‘His bowels were recalcitrant in strange surroundings’.

[Rohinton Mistry. Tales from Firozsha Baag. 1987. Print. Page 7.]-

He anticipates constipation ‘with perverse satisfaction.’

The Parsee sense of separateness from and superiority towards other Indians is represented by Rustomji’s attitude to the servant who comes to clean their flat. He thinks of Gajra as a *gunga* which is a racial slur later a more violent abuse of ‘ghatis’ at the crowd who surround him when an accident takes place involving Rustomji. He engages in covert sexual

fantasies as he watches her work showing his desire. However, the sense of a fundamental separation of the Parsees from their surroundings is epitomised by the colour white. Whiteness here operates as both a traditional symbol of purity prescribed by religion as well as an attempt to remain clean in the chaos of Bombay. Rustomji in particular cherishes the elegance of his white dugli which is an indicator of his self worth. We learn that on his way to the fire temple:

‘He decided to pass the H route bus stop and walk further, to the A-1 Express past Tar Gully and its menacing mouth. His starchy whiteness aroused in him feelings of resplendence and invincibility, and he had no objection to the viewing of his progress by the street.’

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page 16. ]

Suitably armoured Rustomji pushes his way to the front of the bus queue. However, his composure is about to be shattered. As he descends from the bus a paan- chewing mouth from the upper deck emits a stream of red juice which catches him between the shoulder blades: blood red on sparkling white, sending him into a paroxysm of rage, and he starts

‘Screaming as painfully as though it was a knife in the back.’

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page17.]

Rustomji vents his ire on the curious crowd berating them as ‘sister fucking ghatis.’ The mood of the crowd changes and he is manhandled. In immediate danger from the angry mob, he comes across the only escape available to him. He spits out his dentures:

‘The collapsed mouth and flapping lip appeased everyone. A general tittering spread through the assembly. Rustomji the clown was triumphant. He had restored to himself the harmlessness of the original entertaining spectacle.’

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page18.]

Meanwhile, Mehroo has gone to the fire temple ahead of her husband, only to find the gates locked and police everywhere. It comes to light that the priest has been murdered by an attendant of the fire temple whom he had stopped from committing theft. Returning home in a sad mood, Mehroo suffers another shock when she sees her husband’s discarded paan stained dugli and mistakes it for the blood stained garments of the murdered dustoor. Due to the misunderstanding of Mehroo, Rustomji comes to term with the sense of a community under attack from the elements in the outside world and also from uncontrollable forces from within. The story strongly conveys the Parsees sense of siege as a marginal entity in a

populous nation. It also prepares us for the latter struggles of the next generation to break free from the confines of what the text shows as an introvert and fiercely loyal community.

The security derived from routine is the feature of the next story, 'One Sunday.' Here the events of an ordinary Sunday is presented on which the middle aged widow Najamai goes to visit her sister's house in Bandra, leaving her flat in the care of her neighbours who are upset by the theft of eighty rupees allegedly by an odd job man Francis who sleeps under the awning of a nearby shop whom the Parsees consider

'Really no better than a homeless beggar'.

[Rohinton Mistry. Tales from Forozsha Baag.1987. Print. Page 30.]

Mistry establishes the interconnectedness of Baag life as he describes the mutual dependence of Najamai and her neighbours. She allows Tehmima and the Boyces to use her refrigerator to store their meat and much needed supplies of ice, while they receive her morning deliveries of bread and milk and let her borrow their newspaper. Terror intrudes the peace of the Baag unexpectedly in the form of Francis as he is surprised by the return of Najamai and he arouses her suspicion by his behaviour. She screams and he escapes immediately. We are also introduced to Kersi Boyce for the first time who is repairing his cricket bat. For Kersi, the emptiness of Sunday is interrupted by Najamai's cries for help and he rushes to her help which arouses his heroic dreams. He is joined in this pursuit with his elder brother Percy which takes them to Tar Gully which is shrouded in dark, crime, dirt and poverty and is contrasted with the order and regularity of the Parsee enclave. It is a predominantly Hindu space and it has a resident cow. People taunt the two as 'Parsee Bawaji' while they ignore them. There is conciliation between the Tar Gully Hindus and Firozsha Baag Parsees who are united against Francis who is a Christian, an outsider and a theft accused and the cries of 'Thief! Thief' only increases more and more. Finally, Francis is caught, given a beating and brought back to Najamai. There is a strong sense of belief of Francis as a victim and there is no evidence to prove that he committed the crime and Najamai reflects on his return,

"How silly they looked. Going after poor Francis with their big bats! As if he would ever have hurt them."

[Rohinton Mistry. Tales from Firozsha Baag. 1987. Print. Page38.]

The whole incident particularly the disturbing result illustrates the little power that the vulnerable communities vent on an individual who is a minority. 'One Sunday' is a kind of

mirror story to 'Auspicious Occasion'. It is a tale of victimisation of the weak outsider which was not expected of a community who is expected to understand the other better.

The play on the word 'squatter', in the story of that same title, draws our attention not just to its relation to an unwelcome immigrant in a new country, but also how the central character, Sarosh-Sid, can effectively empty his bowels. It is about the uncomfortable experience of emigration. Sarosh-Sid has immigrated to Canada, but promises to return to India if, after exactly 10 years, he has not become completely Canadian. Ten years later, he feels entirely westernised, except that he is unable to use western toilets and must still squat to achieve relief. The fact that his toilet technique is different from the one preferred in his new host country and is linked to racism:

'The world of washrooms is private and at the same time very public. The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow crack between stall door and jamb- all these added up to only one thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way. And if one outside could receive the fetor of Sarosh's business wafting through the door, poor unhappy Sarosh could detect something malodorous in the air: the presence of xenophobia and hostility.'

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page 156.]

The use of defecation difficulties is a metaphor for the failure of cultural assimilation and is typical of Mistry's writings, where the body becomes a site for the exploration of social issues and anxieties. In an attempt to cure himself of the cultural constipation, due to which he lost his job, he visits a pair of advisers, specialists in treating a range of digestive problems among immigrant communities all of which point out the real obstacles the newcomers to the West might face.

Sarosh- Sid finally achieves his desired evacuation when he is about to leave Canada. He manages to use the toilet in the plane that is about to take off bringing him back to India. He returns to a Bombay that is altered and unfamiliar. There is no way to recover the old life now.

'The old pattern was never found by Sarosh; he searched in vain. Patterns of life are selfish and unforgiving.'

[Rohinton Mistry. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. 1987. Print. Page 167.]

The warning moral of the story is supposedly offered by Sarosh himself. He chooses to paraphrase Othello, another black outsider undone by an alien host culture:

‘When you shall see these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: tell them that in Toronto once there lived a Parsee boy as best he could. Set you down this, and say, besides, that for some it was good, and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior.’

[Rohinton Mistry. Tales from Firozsha Baag. 1987. Print. Page168.]

“Alice Ann Munro is a Canadian short story writer and Nobel Prize winner. Her work has been described as having revolutionised the architecture of short stories in its tendency to move forward in time. Her stories have been said to “embed more than announce, reveal more than parade.”

[W.H.New. Literature in English, the Canadian encyclopedia.com.2December2012. Web.Page3]

Munro’s fiction is most often set in her native Huron County in south-western Ontario. Her stories explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Munro’s writings have established her as one of the greatest contemporary writers of fiction. Her strong regional focus is one of the features of her fiction. Another is the omniscient narrator who serves to make sense of the world. Many compare Munro’s small town setting to writers from the rural south of the United States. As in the works of Faulkner, her characters often confront deep rooted customs and traditions, but the reactions of Munro’s characters is less intense than the southern counterparts. Her male characters tend to capture the essence of the Everyman, while her female characters are more complex. Much of Munro’s work exemplifies the literary genre known as Southern Ontario Gothic.

Munro’s work is often compared with the greatest short story writer. In her stories plot is secondary and very little happens. Garan Holcombe notes:

“All is based on the epiphanic moment, the sudden enlightenment, the concise, subtle, revelatory detail. Munro’s work deals with love and worth and the failings of both. She shares Chekhov’s obsession with time and our much-lamented inability to delay or prevent its relentless movement forward.”

[Garan Holcombe. Alice Munro. Contemporary Writers. London. British Arts Council.2005.Print.Page24.]

A frequent theme of her work has been the dilemmas of a girl coming of age and coming to terms with her family and the small town she grew up. It is a mark of her style for characters to experience a revelation that sheds light on, and gives meaning to an event.

Munro's prose reveals the ambiguities of life: ironic and serious at the same time, mottoes of Godliness and honour and flaming bigotry, special, useless knowledge, tones of shrill and happy outrage, the bad taste, the heartlessness, the joy of it. Her style places the fantastic, next to the ordinary with each cutting the other in ways that effortlessly evoke life. As Robert Thacker wrote:

"Munro's writing creates ... an empathetic union among readers, critics most apparent among them. We are drawn to her writing by its verisimilitude- not of mimesis, so called and ... 'realism'- but rather the feeling of being itself ... of just being a human being."

[Robert Thacker. Review of *Some other reality: Alice Munro's Something I've been Meaning to Tell You*, by Louis K MacKendric. *Journal of Canadian Studies*. Summer 1998. Print. Page 26.]

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice\\_Munro.Web.Page1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Munro.Web.Page1)]

"The fictions of Canada's greatest short story author Alice Munro are tied to specific geographical locations, for Munro is fascinated by local history and geography and her stories offer social maps of small town life in rural Ontario. To read Munro's stories is to discover the delights of seeing two worlds at one: an ordinary everyday world and to the shadowy map of another world which is imaginary and laid over the real one so that when we are reading her story we can go through one world into the other easily.

In her essay "What is Real?" written in 1982 she tries to explain how she writes a story:

'Some of the material I have been lying around already, in memories and observations, and some I invent, and some I have to go diligently looking for {factual details}, while some is dumped in my lap (anecdotes and bits of speech). I see how this material might go together to make the shape I need, and I try it.'

[Alice Munro. *What is Real?* 1982. Print. Page 4.]

How is it that these stories travel so well and appeal to a much wider readership? Do readers outside Canada read them for the ways in which the lives represented look different or, similar from our own lives? It is her documentary quality which is the secret of her

international popularity because she creates locations and characters so perfectly. At the same time, these stories could be anywhere – any small town, any farm house:

‘A lot of people think I’m a regional writer. And I use the region where I grew up a lot. But I don’t have any idea of writing to show the kind of things that happen in a certain place. These things happen and the place is part of it. But in a way its incidental.’

[Alice Munro. What is Real? 1982. Print. Page 5.]

Her female narrators have a fine double awareness of community values and what else goes on outside those limits. They are fascinated by dark holes and by undescribed spaces with their scandalous stories of desire and transgression. Munro registers this doubleness of vision in ‘Lives of Girls and Women’ when describing her adolescent narrator’s hometown of Jubilee:

‘People’s lives in Jubilee, as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing, unfathomable, deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum’.

[Alice Munroe. Lives of Girls and Women. 1971. Print. Page6.]

Such perception exposes the limits of realistic fiction by its challenge to domestic surfaces, hinting at what is usually hidden or unspoken within the acknowledged order of small town social life. Munro uses cartography as a device which allows her stories of the multiple lives in small towns to be told:

‘Tracing the outline of a continent again, digging the stick in, trying to make a definite line, I paid attention to its shape as I would sometimes pay attention to the shape of real continents or islands on real maps, as if the shape itself were a revelation beyond words, and I would be able to make sense of it, if I tried hard enough, and had time.’

[Alice Munro. Lives of Girls and Women. 1971. Print. Page45.]

The point about maps is that they chart locations of things in relationship to one another, providing a visual and spatial understanding of places, event and processes. Maps are a way of representing not only topographical features but also social geography and historical records through buried maps of a community’s past, while they may also be used as metaphors to illustrate relationship between inner psychological spaces and the outside world. In Munro’s works, alternative worlds are positioned along side in the same spaces of geography and fiction so that realistic street maps of small towns are undermined by maps of the character’s inner life and by memory maps of the nearly forgotten family or local history.”

[Coral Ann Howells. Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers. Manchester University Press.1998.Print. Pages 1-5.]

“Speaking about her fiction in the early 1970s Munro refers to its primary location in her home place of small town south western Ontario, though what she emphasises is not its familiarity but its strangeness. The key word is ‘Gothic’: it contains the promise of melodramatic violence and buried lives. It also shows Munro’s closeness to women authors of the American South and their stories excited Munro so much making it possible for her to imagine writing about the small time communities and rural landscapes where she grew up. She feels that it is a matter of vision where North American women writing a thousand miles apart {in Mississippi and Ontario} share a similar vision of place and of people’s relation to their place as if there are always multiple worlds to be charted, so the small town in their fiction becomes mysterious as well as touchable.

The stories in ‘Dance of the Happy Shades,’ written over a period of fifteen years show the experimental quality during the 1950s and 1960s and the moment of glory when she found her voice in the summer of 1959 with ‘The Peace of Utrecht’. They performed the function of gossip for not only do they give their narrators the power to cope with the circumstances which they cannot change but they also try to make sense out of the randomness and confusion of everyday life. ‘Dance of the Happy Shades’ tells the story in the first person from a child’s point of view as she begins to understand the secret worlds that exist on the periphery of the comfortable known world of home. ‘The Peace of Utrecht’ told from an adult’s perspective is the attempt to represent the scandal of the dreadful illness and death of a mother.

‘Dance of the Happy Shades’ presents a world of grey barns and dilapidated shed and the windmills that could not turn. Then the story shifts into more ambiguous area as the father drives beyond his habitual route to a place outside his territory, where a strange encounter occurs. He takes his children to visit his old girlfriend Nora Cronin. If she had not been a Roman Catholic, he would have married her. The author reminds the reader of religious prejudice against Roman Catholics in Scots-Irish rural Ontario:

‘So- and –so digs with the wrong foot, they would say.’

[Alice Munro. Dance of the Happy Shades. 1968. Print. Page14.]

Despite the ordinary shabbiness of an unpainted house and an untidy farm where Nora lives with her blind old mother, the child knows that there is something extraordinary about

this visit. She cannot understand the emotional currents between her father and Nora just as she hears and sees the veneer of conversational pleasantries hiding their failed romance with its mutual longings and regrets. What the child fully understands is the woman's loneliness which is on display as they drive away:

'she stands close to the car in her soft, brilliant dress. She touches the fender, making an unintelligible mark in the dust there.'

[Alice Munro. *Dance of the Happy Shades*. 1968. Print. Page 17.]

Though the story is situated within the rules of realism, the attention to detail reveals the 'other side of dailiness' where people's lives are not only dull and simple but also amazing. We witness the process of transformation where objects and events in the real world carry a new significance within the subjective life of the story teller. The story itself becomes a kind of subjective mapping of secret worlds in which the child has been initiated by her father where she gets a glimpse of an uncharted territory as fantastic as any landscape out of a fairytale.

"Both realism and fantasy are revealed as narrative convention for translating reality into words though they work according to different principles. In Del's story telling both of them are present. They can be changed accordingly so that both familiar and unfamiliar are present in her narrative. In 'Lives of Girls and Women', everything is in the plural as the stories enclose contradictory views within the same fictional space.

It is strange to emphasise plurality when there is a single women narrator who tells about her childhood, adolescence till the point when she fails to get her scholarship and decides to leave her native town. Double vision is manifested within fictive autobiography as the story is told by an older Del who reveals that she becomes an author as desired in the 'Epilogue' to this book. Del is different from her mother, aunts and girlfriends and also like them, a product of Jubilee and its small town values in the 1940s and 1950s.

The stories through which Del maps her life are related to the traditional subjects of women's writing and of Canadian small town fiction. 'Heirs of the Living Body' is concerned with discovering the buried maps of the past through local history and the history of the author's family who have been there for a very long period. It is a story about Del's great-uncle Craig, and his death and funeral when she is around twelve years old. His dead body poses questions about Del's relation to the 'living body' of her family together with the question of how to record history from a women's point of view.

The custodian of tradition is the patriarch Uncle Craig, clerk of Fairmile township, chronicler of the history of Wawanash County and keeper of the family tree back to 1670, in Ireland. His historical account written on a typewriter focuses on the achievements of men because their work is public and worthy to be recorded while the work of a woman is private and domestic and so not worthy. As a child, Del challenges him by drawing attention to things he omits. Such evidence is available, like the photograph on Uncle Craig's office wall of the original log cabin built on the wilderness site:

'That picture seems to have been in another country, where everything was much lower, muddier, darker than here.'

[Alice Munro. *Lives of Girls and Women*. 1971. Print. Page 28]

However, Uncle Craig chooses to ignore it.

Del manages to tell her version as a revelation of the lives of some of the girls and women within this social structure- Aunts Elspeth and Grace who are the sisters of the uncle and they keep house for him, Aunt Moira and her handicapped daughter Mary Agnes, and her own mother who lives in another world, that of the 1950s women, struggling towards an economic and intellectual independence. Their lives are so different from others that the family history begins to look like a mosaic of secret worlds existing under the surface of the ordinary and mundane way of life. As an inheritor of the family history, Del tries to make up the story of her own life:

'I... exchanged my mother's world of serious sceptical questions, endless but somehow disregarded housework, lumps in the mashed potatoes, and unsettling ideas, for theirs of work and gaiety, comfort and order, intricate formality. There was a whole new language to learn in their house.'

[Alice Munro. *Lives of Girls and Women*. 1971. Print. Page 37.]

Del uses the image of the maze to describe Uncle Craig's house after his death. Del notices that the mystery of death is a term which cannot be accommodated on any map, though its presence is felt

'floating around loose, ignored but powerful.'

[Alice Munro. *Lives of Girls and Women*. 1971. Print. Page 46.]

At the funeral, Del tries to retreat from the rituals of death by going out into the old store room at the back of the house which is filled with objects of the past; but from there she cannot escape. Later as a teenager, Del has to accept the gift of her uncle's unfinished county

history. Though she discards it as ‘dead, heavy and useless’ and allows it to rot in the basement, much latter she herself becomes a teller of local history. Del insists on telling the story in her own manner. As a female chronicler, she writes the stories which her uncle has omitted while as a novelist, she shows how traditional realistic writing can be done to include moments of intent subjectivity and visionary perception, illuminating some of the dark secrets ‘hidden within the living body of history’.

[Alice Munro.Lives of Girls and Women.1971.Print. Page41]

[Coral Ann Howells.AliceMunro: Contemporary World Writers. Manchester University Press.1998.Print.Pages 32-41.]

Rohinton Mistry’s style is complex and direct as is seen in his short story collection ‘Tales from Firozsha Baag.’ He has employed a combination of simplicity and sophistication to analyse a character like Kersi who comes to term with social and political circumstances which forces him to come face to face with strange questions about morality and personal responsibilities. ‘Tales from Firozsha Baag’ consists of questions of belonging, migration and identity which are the essential qualities of multiculturalism which Mistry has carried with him to Canada. Despite living in Canada since 1975, Mistry’s fiction is embedded with the spirit of Bombay. Bombay is not merely a location. It can be described as a home in which characters live, breathe and grapple with their spiritual and material demons. Munro on the other hand describes the rural Canada and its people in a colourful manner. Her stories are written in Gothic style presenting the mundane lives of people in an interesting way. Her heroines are the protagonists of her stories describing their romantic and sexual encounters. They also try to break away from their ordinary life in order to achieve something in life. Thus, we can say that both Mistry and Munro dealt with multiculturalism in an effective manner and so we can relate ourselves with their stories.

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