

The Plight of the Immigrants as Portrayed in Rohinton Mistry’s short story “Lend Me Your Light”

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Abstract

“I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come to Toronto” (Mistry, 217)

Rohinton Mistry is one of the most dependable story tellers who enmesh his readers into the magical web of the narratology. His short story “Lend Me Your Light” is one among the eleven short stories compiled together as *Tales From Firozsha Baag*. Kerzi is the narrator who shares his immigrant experience as Tiresias, a blind seer cursed often by Gods. The diasporic experience created a sense of longing and identity. Kerzi finds his elder brother Percy as a man who has rightly identified his calling to mitigate the sufferings of the poor farmers in remote Indian villages. The short story is autobiographical as it brings to light the plight of immigration and Rohinton Mistry himself has migrated to Canada for better prospects. This paper explicates the core conflicts that an immigrant has to battle within his mind as they set their feet out of the country that is familiar, to places that are only imagined in fictional stories. It breaks down the illusion that the best part of one’s life begin abroad.

Key Words: Immigration, familiar, corruption, poverty, identity, crisis

Rohinton Mistry is one of the notable writers of fiction who has brought laurels to Indian literature by bringing alive the words and phrases to construct the Bombay life without much alteration. His vivid portrayal of events will take us through the inmates of the Baag who had their ups and downs in life. He thereby connects us to the relatable happenings around us and make us savour each moment that we spend in this planet.

“Lend Me Your Light” is a short story that revolves around the life of Kerzi. He didn’t have a strong bond with his brother Percy, who had an affluent friendship with Jamshed. His only fond memory is when he and his mother accompanied Percy to Jamshed’s house to listen the original soundtrack of *My Fair Lady*. The friendship turned sour when Percy stepped into college. He no longer visited Jamshed but grew passionate about mitigating the sufferings of poor farmers who fall prey to giant loan sharks and end their life without remedy. Kerzi was considered to be the light of the family and his parents sent him to Canada to pursue higher studies and get settled there. Percy was looked down upon by Jamshed for his poor choices in life as there is no remedy to end corruption in India. Kerzi thinks very highly of Percy and finds the irony in being home and being lonely and depressed in a foreign land. He questions the mentality of immigrants who criticize India for being dirty, disorderly and seeped with corruption but do nothing about it.

Rohinton Mistry narrates the love of inmates who bless Kerzi when he is about to leave India. We can find the aunties and uncles flooding his house with sweets, garlands and advice. When Percy was about to venture into a sociological project that will save the Indian farmers, no one approved of his choices. We read that he is seen as a loser by a society that always claims material wealth and a life abroad will secure one’s status in the Indian society.

Kerzi compares himself to the blind Tiresias who was blinded when he left the place of his birth as he was infected with conjunctivitis the day before boarding his first flight to Canada. Jamshed had migrated to the U.S and he wrote a letter to Kerzi stating that Percy refuses to accept reality and nothing ever improves in India as corruption had made a hell out of it. Kerzi found the irony in the accusation that, “Was it himself he is angry with for not being able to come to terms with matters as Percy had? Was it because of the powerlessness that all of us experience who, mistaking weakness for strength, walk away from one thing or another?” (Mistry, 219). Kerzi considers the disdain and contempt expressed by Jamshed was his way of lightening the burden of not being present to mitigate the problems in India.

Kerzi could not feel at home in Canada but he had to pursue his career in the foreign land to comfort his parents and provide them a stable livelihood in future. He finds a real hero in his brother and wished he could have had a stronger relationship with him. He says, “There you were, my brother, wagging battles against corruption and evil, while I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada TV” (Mistry, 223). Percy wrote a letter to Kerzi explaining the problems that he faces while fighting the loan sharks and how their work got recognized by Media and the project getting donors to help the farmers. When Kerzi went home, he missed Percy. He later learned

from his brother that, one of his friends Navjeet was murdered by the loan sharks and he had come to town to discuss their next moves.

"Lend Me Your Light" is a metaphoric statement by Kerzi to Percy. He wants the immigrants to think about the NGOs and the social activists who fight for their life to improve the standards in India while they enjoy a clean and tidy life abroad. It is a reaction against those who put down their country and mimic the Britishers.

Work Cited:

Mistry, Rohinton. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2003. Print.