

Summary of MRP entitled PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF ROHINTON MISTRY

By

Sujata Chakravorty

Women have been treated in a variety of ways by writers down the ages. More often they have been portrayed in a derogatory manner. However, the feminists have tried to uphold the position of women and give them a proper place in society.

Female foeticide and infanticide are much debated and written about issues in India. A very hot topic of discussion, the issue finds mention in the present novels of Mistry as well. This problem is so severe that it knows no barriers of caste and class. Members from all strata of society rejoice or grieve on the birth of a son or daughter respectively. Sons are so much in demand that families are prepared to go to any extent for the birth of a male heir, propitiating the gods, keeping difficult fasts, going on arduous pilgrimages, etc. The need for a male heir is so completely instilled in the minds of women, that women become the greatest enemies of their own sex, ready to abort without any qualms and kill if necessary the innocent little girls.

Through the contrasting examples of Roxana and Mrs. Kapur, Mistry seems to be upholding the role of the ideal, virtuous lady of the house. In all his three novels, he glorifies such characters – Dilnavaz in *Such a Long Journey*, Roopa in *A Fine Balance* and finally Roxana in *Family Matters*. These women come across as selfless, putting their family, husband, children above everything else. They are beautiful, soft weak and look up to the men for most things in life.

The women, whenever they try to protest, are brought back to seeking support from the men in their lives, unable to exist by themselves, in a world of their own- that privilege is reserved for the men in Mistry's novels.

Mistry's depiction of Roshan is typical of the portrayal of women in *Such a Long Journey*. Life happens to women, they are the object of masculine attention and desire. Character 'development' is inordinately based on physical description, and women are portrayed as 'types' rather than individuals.

It has been found through a close analysis that the female characters in Mistry's novels do not really come across as round characters. Mistry does not allow them to develop much. Rather they are cast as stereotypes. Dilnavaz, Dina, Roxana, are all beautiful women who are really concerned about their families. They are at times ready to sacrifice whatever they can in order to maintain peace in the family. Bharucha feels that the character of Daisy in *Family Matters* is the most promising one of all the women in Mistry's novels. She is the only one who has achieved much in her career without the support of a man which is quite commendable. She has got the spirit to carry forward, to achieve higher goals.

Mistry through these instances reminds us of the age old constructs of what goes into defining womanhood – docility, obedience 'being good', submissive, preparing from girlhood itself to look after a house in life. But through Dina's slow, but sure and spirited rebellion, he also brings hope to show that times are changing and all women do not take things lying down, without a murmur. Dina, with the help of her friend Zenobia, cuts off her hairs in school, even though it means a sound beating from Nusswan at home. From childhood itself Dina balances the tightrope, slowly, but effectively.

Mistry clearly casts his women characters as one of two types in a dichotomy that defines women as either pure and silent – suffering, or malevolent – Pativratas or treacherous wenches. This dichotomy transcends cultural boundaries and is strongly entrenched in Indian tradition.