

Between the Past and the Present: A Journey Through Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*

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Abstract

The novel *Such a Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry is a intricate creation of national conflict of the Parsi people of India that encompasses the issue of identity, allegiance and existence amidst the altering times of history. Against the backdrop of the post-independence struggles in India, the novel explores the inner and outer conflicts of Gustad Noble whose life is entangled with the turning of events around the country and his own life. Mistry skillfully incorporates historical scenes with fiction and describes the difference in the perception of these events by the individuals who are victims of occurrences.

The issue of isolation which the Parsi community faces, as well as how it must resist changing its culture in the face of outside influences like the rise of the Shiv Sena and increasing political instability in Mumbai are also discussed in the novel. The novel stands as a symbol of the struggle within himself - a microcosm of the actual social and political processes involved. Themes of loss and disillusionment and reconciliation arise because of the personal experience of the characters, which highlights the conflict between the past and the present. The idea of individual change becomes a theme in the novel by Mistry and is presented with a complex account of how individuals find their identities during the fluid nature of political, cultural and emotional fluxes.

Keywords: Mistry, Parsi community, political unrest, historical scenes, cultural, and emotional fluxes, identity crisis etc.

Introduction

In the novel, *Such a Long Journey*, Rohinton Mistry has explored the life of the Parsi people once again and this book has touched the hearts of readers. Although the last narrative in *Tales of Firozsha Baag* is set in Canada, *Such a Long Journey* is squarely placed in Bombay, India, where life is hectic and crowded. Similarly to his previous short stories, this novel is also concerned with the diasporic experience, and Mistry reflects on his path to being an immigrant. Mistry is an Indian born in 1975 and left the country to go to Canada and the theme of emigration and the culture clashes that come with it is the main theme of *Such a long Journey*. The novel is closely attached to historical and political processes of the time and the theme of personal and collective identity is investigated by Mistry.

The novel by Mistry frequently explores the confusing or contradictory nature of the self, community, place, identity, and this approach has adopted the syncretic quality of post-colonial experience. The novel has employed the theme of a journey, which is a key factor in most diasporic literature. Nilufer E. Bharucha (2015) notes that the theme of traveling plays a paramount role in interpretation of this text, and in most of the literature of diasporic literature. The epigraphs used in the opening of the novel precondition the situation, the first one is based on the *Shahnama of Firdausi* and reminds of the great Iranian empire, but emphasizes the degraded position of the present-day Parsi community. The second epigraph, which belonged to T. S. Eliot, *Journey of the Magi*, refers to the ancient Zoroastrian religion and journey of the Magi, Zoroastrian priests. The last quote in Tagore Gitanjali is a reflection on the movement of the Parsis through one nation to another and thus adapting to newer realities.

In the novel, Mistry puts the plight of the Parsi community and their hardships into the limelight. It is a story of a Parsi hero, Gustad Noble and the political situation of India as a setting. The novel reflects the struggles of the Parsi people who have to find their way in the shifting social and political landscape. Mistry intertwines various tales of his characters, each of them being concerned with the future of their community, as well as the changes that take place in the surrounding world. The destiny of these characters is also directly linked to the destiny of their community, and their tales can be viewed as some kind of a preservation, as they represent the current struggles and realities they have to contend with.

The first which has been extensively publicized at its release, is characterized by the combination of realism in politics and literature. It does not merely explore the life of the Parsis but also plunges into the politics of India at the time. *Such a Long Journey* can be regarded as

a nostalgic look at the community Mistry abandoned, but it also includes the bitter look at the contradictions of the Parsi life. Parsis have to balance the two worlds of being part of their community and the country in their homeland, which also reflects the conflicts and struggles of identity in the post-colonial world. It is important to view the novel within the context of the Parsi community to understand them completely as Mistry has portrayed them. The novel focuses on the conflicts between the Parsis and other religious communities in India especially through the character of Malcolm Saldana. Saldana tries to prove that Christianity had dominated over Zoroastrianism in the history of India by tracing the history of the introduction of Christianity to India, stating that Christianity was introduced on the coasts of Malabar more than 1900 years ago when Apostle Thomas landed in the country of India, many years before the seventh century Britain had to send its Parsis to India as a refuge against the persecution of the Muslims.

Such a Long Journey is also set in a politically tumultuous year 1971, but it also examines the political history of India in the 1960s. It was the ten-year period when Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the new state of India, passed away and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, took his place. The novel by Mistry depicts the most important events of the 1960s, including the war between India and China, the unexpected demise of the heir to the throne, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the activity of world superpowers, and the ever-increasing role of Indira Gandhi and son Sanjay (Sarma 90).

The fall of Nehru marked the dawn of the political decay in India, full of corruption, nepotism and power politics. This was also the time when the religious tolerance in Bombay fell. As the communal riots devastated the north Indian after the partition in 1947, Bombay had been spared of this violence to a great extent. But in 1960s, formation of radical political parties such as the Shiv Sena signified the change of the politics and the religion in the city. Shiv Sena caused divisions as it was blaming Muslims, Tamils and migrants to other regions of India as outsiders who were robbing the sons of the soil of Bombay resources and jobs. But the best historical setting that is explained in the latter section of *Such a long journey* is that of the Indo Pak war of December 1971 that had been initiated by a divided election outcome in Pakistan.

The geographical and ethnical partitioning of the two wings of Pakistan was in opposition following the 1947 partition. When the East Pakistani electoral outcomes had gone against the West Pakistani strong political and military forces, there was a brutal reaction on the part of the West Pakistan. The results were not accepted by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General

Yahya Khan who ruled the West Pakistani side and arrested the East Pakistani winning candidates and unleashed an extremely fierce crackdown on opposition forces. This violent suppression resulted in a huge refugee problem with some ten million refugees escaping to the Indian-controlled Bengal (Sarma 110).

This exodus put great pressure on the resources of India and the government introduced a Refugee Tax to bring down the impact of the exodus and this contributed to the prices and this is a point of resentment by many of the characters of the novel. It was also well supported by the masses to use the Indian troops to protect the Bengalis, though Indira Gandhi, who did not want to be viewed as the aggressor, at first denied the proposal. Instead, she chose to prepare and arm guerrilla bands to gain operation across the border which is a political subplot that Mistry develops in *Such a Long Journey*. As other postcolonial authors, including Sidhwa, Mistry questions the official account of episodes like Nagarwala case, which was still alive in the minds of people. Mistry challenges the existing channels of power and uses those sources such as gossip, newspaper articles, diaries, and letters to empower the oppressed. In a way, Gustad, the main character, represents the marginalized individuals, who defy the state hegemony. Mistry uses the character of Gustad to expose gaps in the official story of Nagarwala case to further show the tensions in the Parsi community.

Such a Long Journey starts with the description of Parsi traditions in Khodadad Building where the main character, Gustad Noble, starts his day by turning east, to pay his respect to Ahura Mazda (Mistry 1). Gohel (2018) remarks on the way the Parsi world in the Khodadad Building is a refuge to Gustad. The novel starts with his ritual of tying and untying his Kusti cord, and then recalls his son with fondness of his navjote ceremony, where he was initiated into the Zoroastrianism religion. According to Gohel,

Mistry's realism goes beyond description; it operates as a moral framework through which the postcolonial subject confronts disillusionment" (89)

Gustad Noble is a middle-class bank worker whose family has its prospects and expectations about future prosperity. He is a happy husband with his wife Dilnavaz and three children, Sohrab, Darius and Roshan. He is also good friends with Major Jimmy Bilimoria, and Dinshawji who also reside in Khodadad Building. Gustad who sees himself in his son Sohrab wants to have the losses and disillusionments of his youth repaid. In a sense, both emotional and mental trips made by Gustad are reminiscent of his past, in which he is comforted. This stability is however destroyed by an abrupt shift in the fortunes of his family. The fact that Sohrab passes

the IIT entrance exam gives hope to Gustad in an otherwise desperate life. The choice of Sohrab to attend the coveted Indian Institute of Technology or IIT is a great cause of joy to Gustad since it gives him hope of a prosperous future to his son; full of opportunities and security.

“The IIT became the promised land... El Dorado and Shangri-la... Atlantis and Camelot... Everything appears possible in Xanadu, and Oz, a location where anything is possible” (Mistry 66).

The dreams of Gustad Noble are broken when Sohrab, his son, declines to enroll to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) that was his hope. The actions of Sohrab are unexpected to his father particularly when he is celebrating the birthday of his daughter Roshan. Sohrab in frustration says:

"It is not suddenly. You know I am tired and sick of IIT, IIT, IIT. I am not into it, I am not a merry good fellow about it, and I am not going there" (Mistry 48).

M.L. Pandit (2017) says,

“Gustad Noble’s dreams and expectations are modest indeed, but circumstances prevailing in the India of his times conspire to deny him even these... His elder son does not join IIT; Roshan, his favourite child, suffers from a prolonged illness; Dinshawaji, his friend, Bilimoria, betrays his trust. Gradually, Gustad Noble modifies his dreams and dilutes his expectations” (9).

The setting of the novel *Such a Long Journey* is mostly in the boundaries of Parsi community at Khodadad Building, where Gustad lives, and the bank where he works. Although it is a story about the Parsis, the book has been expanded to the larger socio-political scenario of India. Through this method of Mistry moving between the local community story and the national one, this is one of the techniques that he will later rely on in his later novels. Mistry acknowledges the leading place of the religious and ritual aspect in defining the human identity, and, therefore, these concerns become the key topics of his fiction. The ethnic, racial and communitarian identities are identified in his narratives by rituals, religious beliefs and their reactions to these traditions by the characters.

The adventure of Gustad in the unknown starts with a mysterious disappearance of his close friend Jimmy Bilimoria. He gets sucked into the Nagarwala case that influences the direction of the novel to a great extent. The way this case is treated by Mistry is similar to the other postcolonial authors such as Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor, who in *Midnight*

Children and *The Great Indian Novel* respectively, criticize the official accounts of the past. In the same vein, Mistry takes the Nagarwala case with other versions to subvert the official account. As an example, Mistry incorporates a newspaper report in the novel, which is then succeeded by a footnote that casts doubts on the relevance of the report:

Although the alleged facts of this case are definitely unusual, what is even more peculiar to this reporter is the circumstances of this very imaginative crime.

“While the alleged facts of this case are certainly unique, what strikes this reporter as even more unusual are the circumstances surrounding this highly imaginative crime. For example, assuming that Mr. Bilimonia has the talent of voice impersonation, is it routine for our national banks to hand over vast sums of money if the Prime Minister telephones? How high up does one have to be in the government or the Congress party to be able to make such a call? And was the chief cashier so familiar with Mrs. Gandhi’s voice that he accepted the instructions without any verification whatsoever? If yes, does that mean that Mrs. Gandhi has done this sort of thing frequently? These questions cry out for answers and till the answers are heard, clearly and completely, the public’s already eroded confidence in our leaders cannot be restored.” (Mistry 142).

Major Jimmy Bilimoria, the best friend of Gustad, simply vanishes without leaving a trace other than stating that he was in an undercover move concerning national security. The reader realizes as the story progresses that Bilimoria is an agent of RAW (the Research and Analysis Wing) which is the secret service of India and is holding money to fund guerilla groups on the side of the border. It, however, emerges too quickly that Jimmy is involved in a far murkier line of events where big amounts of money are embezzled. This subplot has been echoed in real life of Captain Sohrab Rustam Nagarwala, who was a RAW agent of Parsi. On May 24, 1971 the chief cashier of the State Bank of India was called by a telephoned person posing as prime minister Indira Gandhi, who instructed him to remove six million rupees and give it to a Bangladesh man. After checking out on the situation, it was found out that the Prime Minister office had not posted the call. The money was taken by Nagarwala who was soon arrested. There were however a few peculiarities in the case such as the speed of trial that took place in only three days and was decided by three different judges. The police did not manage to present the most important evidence a tape recording of Nagarwala imitating the voice of Mrs. Gandhi and contradictions between his confession and the version of a cashier were never properly discussed. The trial of Nagarwala came to a rather quick conclusion: four years of jail

term. Nagarwala appealed in vain to seek a retrial after his arrest and eventually died in custody in suspicious circumstances in March 1972. (Basu)

The Parsis were very much upset with the proceedings of the Nagarwala case especially the death of Nagarwala as it brought too many questions in the minds of the Parsis. The Parsis were concerned with anything that slandered their community. They were so much convinced that no member of their community would ever wish to slander the whole country. One of the Parsis gave his opinion on what had happened:

“She is a shrewd woman; these are vote-getting tactics, showing the poor she is on their side. Saali always up to some mischief.” (Mistry 38-39)

The Nagarwala incident that involved a Parsi shook the image of the community a great deal. The Parsis who were already deprived of most of their cultural heritage by the historical invasion and in adapting to the India way of life had evolved a unique culture which fused ancient myths and recent success. They were proud of their contributions in different disciplines in India and high ethical practices. The Nagarwala affair however shook their self-worth. One of the Parsis wrote about this sentiment of disillusionment:

“The Nagarwala incident, because it involved a Parsi, jolted the self-image of the community no less. ... the Parsis were deeply anguished by the ambivalent role Nagarwala had played in the sordid story.” (Daruwala qtd. in Dodiya 29)

Mistry appears to imply that the feeling of insecurity that the Parsis had, is exaggerated by the emergence of fundamentalism in Mumbai. The growing power of the Shiv Sena, the right wing political party, is raising eyebrows among the Parsis, who believe that the party does not favour the minority groups. Dinshawji, who is a close friend of Gustad, shows his anger towards the Shiv Sena:

“No manners, no sense, nothing. And who is the cause of this attitude? That Hitler-and-Mussolini adoring bastard Shiv Sena leader. Maharashtra as Maharashtrians, rubbish. They will not rest until they finish with Maratha Raj.” (Mistry 73).

Another issue that angers Gustad, the main character, is the move by Indira Gandhi to nationalize the banks as he considers it to be a political gimmick that would win her popularity at the expense of the Parsi community. When Gustad talks to Dinshawji concerning this decision, he thinks of the loss of respect and prestige formerly held by his community within the banking industry:

“What days those were, Yaar. What fun we used to have... The kings of banking during the time were Parsis. Such respect we used to get. Only the entire atmosphere has been poisoned now. Since that time, Indira nationalized the banks.” (Mistry 38).

Jaydip Sinh Dodiya has another interpretation of the choice taken by Gandhi. Where Gustad and other Parsis see the nationalization as harmful to their interests, Dodiya believes that the action was in the best interest of the poor masses in India. He writes: Gustad believes that the nationalization of the banks has failed in any country. It has been done however, as a means of obtaining a political mileage at the sacrifice of the interest of the Parsi bankers by Mrs. Gandhi. Indeed, it was even then impossible to avoid nationalizing the banks in the greater interest of the oppressed masses of India. According to Jaydipsinh Dodiya (2019),

The concern of Parsi community figures prominently in *Such a Long Journey*. The inhabitants of Khodadad Building are representatives of a cross-section of middle-class Parsis expressing all the angularities of a dwindling community.” (114).

The physical location of the Khodadad Building which is present at *Such a Long Journey* is one of the symbols that are very strong in the sense that they are a representation of the minority mentality that goes throughout the Parsi community. The building is in the center of Bombay, a Parsi enclave, nearly a ghetto, promoting the paranoia that such a place inevitably creates. At some point, the complex is compared to the museum, where the residents are trapped in a state of decay, much like the atrophy and stagnation of the apartment of Gustad. This is enhanced by the fact that municipal plans of destroying the wall around the compound in order to expand the road is seen as a form of existential threat to the community which further accentuates their sense of being besieged. Even the wall that was previously holding back the hectic and disorganized world cannot be kept clean anymore; it is used like a common latrine by passers-by, like dogs to mark up their territory. Mistakes Gustad can no longer handle are coming in at the cost of his own personal anxieties, which are symbolized by the decaying that is going to crush him (Mistry 77).

It is also possible to discuss the theme of isolation and the emotional crisis of it by means of the epigraph that can be found in *Gitanjali* by Tagore (1912). Tagore writes about a wall that one surrounds himself with, which makes the person blind to who he really is:

“I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into the sky day by day, I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.” (Poem 29)

Such emotional crisis is a reflection of the self-imposed isolation of Gustad. The shadow cast by the wall is a metaphorical darkness in his apartment, which is worsened by the blackout paper that Gustad has pasted in his windows in the case of the Indo-Chinese war. Although Gustad is a devout reader who leads the family in prayers every morning at dawn, his wife Dilnavaz notes that, in this house, the morning never arrives (Mistry 1). The blackout paper fulfills a psychological requirement of Gustad, barring the light of both the physical and the political transformation in India as the country looks forward to war.

The blackout paper also represents how Gustad wants to protect himself against the historical events that have occurred and would soon affect the nation with feelings of uncertainty. This seclusion is further accentuated in his relationship with Sohrab and Jimmy Bilimoria whose loss makes Gustad lost and betrayed. In the case of Gustad, even contact with members of the family threatens betrayal and he is all the more indulging in past dreaming. He later even decides to cease reading the newspapers altogether, preferring to live in the present and not to acknowledge the reality.

Gustad is the dilemma of all those who attempt to hold on to the past as a means of defense against eventual change. One such thing is the butterfly collection of Sohrab which is an illustration of a wasted childhood whose contents still deteriorate regardless of his efforts to save them. The change is impossible to stop and this idea is supported by the nature of Miss Kutpitia who is a strange spinster and who, similarly to Miss Havisham in the *Great Expectations* by Dickens, stores the treasures of her dead nephew Farad in the locked room. Still speaking with the shadows in her dusty apartment, in a turning point, an accidental fire sets her free of her emotional prison, by burning the past that she lived in, and she is free to move on. The trip of Gustad, as well, is a reflection of such a desire to get out of the past. This is a catharsis in the life of Miss Kutpitia, which brings out the theme of being imprisoned and finding freedom, and this theme resonates in the novels of Dickens and Mistry. This aspect of prisons is not only a physical condition but also a psychological and emotional one and this is demonstrated by the sequestering of Jimmy Bilimoria towards the end of the novel and by secluding himself which Gustad does to himself. It is the reflection of the legendary statement by T.S. Eliot (1943):

"We think of the key, each in his prison, thinking of the key—each confirms a prison"
(45).

In the novel, Rohinton Mistry uses the language manipulation aspect which is playing with names. There is a constant changing of names with discarding and adopting new names, and this shows how names are associated with power. An example of such a secret first name, in the case of the bank manager, Mr. Madon, the secret first name, whereas old Mr. Evasji loses his nickname, the watermelon, with age. Ghulam Mohammad addresses Jimmy Bilimoria as Bili-boy and the latter claims the anagram Mira Obili when he speaks to Gustad through a different name. The name and power problem can also be seen when Dr. Paymaster tries to change the name of the previous doctor on the sign he has but his patients refuse.

In his essay on the novel, David William (1916) appeals to the concepts of Jacques Derrida on naming:

...“Of Grammatology ends with an assertion that that which is contained in a name is nothing short of the entire coercive series of relationships that surround the subject” (14).

This notion is echoed in the outcry by Dinshawji concerning the renaming of streets in Bombay by the Shiv Sena that is aimed at removing the remnants of British power and reclaiming Marathi identity. Dinshawji complains of how old names have been lost, which he perceives to represent his past life and identity:

"Names are so important, I grew up on Lamington road... I have been working at Flora Fountain since the beginning of my life. And one beautiful day the name is changed, and what becomes of the life I led?" (Mistry 74).

The fact that Dinshawji is attached to old names also shows his nostalgia of the old and his uneasiness with the emergence of Marathi chauvinism under the Shiv Sena to underline the alienation of the Parsis. Jokes at the cost of Laurie Coutinho, the Christian typist at the bank, are another feature of his humour, which has some Gujarati jokes. Laurie, a non-Gujarati, keeps smiling as Dinshawji humiliates her. Later Laurie is informed about the meaning of his words and is offended greatly. Dinshawji is dying and regrets his behaviour and no longer teases her but Gustad is sorry about him and notices when his moral decadence began.

Peter Morey (2017) remarks that Dinshawji does not realize the power dynamics in his language use especially when flirting with Laurie. He calls her the Parsi lingo word ‘lorri’, meaning penis, without intending to know how offending she is. Deploring, Laurie complains to Gustad:

"When somebody calls my name... I feel bad. It brings back to my mind the dirty meaning. Mr. Dinshawji has destroyed my personal name" (Mistry 76).

Such displacement of the will and deed reflects the disparity between thinking and acting and reflects in the lines of *The Hollow Men* by T.S. Eliot:

"Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act /... / Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the shadow" (Eliot 72-75).

Such a Long Journey deals with the theme of the journey on a physical and emotional level as discussed in the life of Gustad Noble. The journey to Delhi to meet Major Bilimoria enables Mistry to reflect the ideal image of the Indian train travel-the struggle of getting seats, food stuffs and the inconvenience of going to the public toilets. Gustad in this trip looks back and cogitates about the uselessness of travelling:

Would this tour of far be worthwhile? Was it worth the trouble to go on a journey? (Mistry 259).

This is demonstrated by the fact that Gustad encounters with Bilimoria as the latter appears to be involved in political corruption especially the exploitation of men such as Bilimoria by Mrs. Gandhi to her political interests. Upon finding Bilimoria in bed Gustad is stricken with sorrow, the friend now a mere version of himself:

"On the bed lay nothing but a shadow; the shadow of the powerful-built army man who once lived in Khodadad Building. His hairline had receded, and sunken cheeks made the bones just sharp and grotesque. The regal handlebar moustache was no more. His eyes had disappeared in their sockets. The neck, what he could see of it, was as scrawny as poor behesti Dinshawji's while under the sheet there seemed barely a trace of those strong shoulders and deep chest which Gustad and Dilnavaz used to point out as a good example to their sons, reminding them always to walk erect, with chest out and stomach in, like Major uncle." (Mistry 267).

Bilimoria is given a four year jail term, which he does not even serve. Gustad is present in his funeral at the Tower of Silence and his son, Sohrab tells his mother that he has ruined the dreams of his father:

"It is no use. I ruined all his dreams; he does not want to take an interest in me anymore" (Mistry 321).

Even his life is a journey as Gustad always travels between locations Chor Bazaar, Delhi, and the house of Ghulam Mohammad. A critic observes that besides being a journey of political realization, Gustad has created a journey of personal enlightenment, an enlightenment of emotion, love and mortality. The travel is a reference to the historical migration of the Parsi people in the eighth century, when Iranian residents of Sanjan (Parabkh) were forced to leave the territory of Iran and arrive in India. Anjana Desai underlines that it is a voyage of a country, a city, and a personality in the novel, and she also asks the same question, The theme of a journey is also developed with the help of the pavement artist who paints the wall of the Khodadad Building on his canvas.

"The materials, as the artist, the life, are temporary: the journey is a cycle of arrival, creation, and obliteration—the treasure to enjoy—and is happened upon, intended, individual, alone—was the thing to enjoy." (Mistry 184).

But his permanence craving comes to him when he thinks of constructing a hut and moving onto permanent oil paint. The riot destroys this longing and gets him back on his temporary trip. The fear of endings, death and change in Gustad is opposed to the impermanence acceptance in the artist. It is only after witnessing the death of Dinshawji and Jimmy and their funeral that Gustad starts to accept the unavoidable losses that are part of human life.

Rohinton Mistry applies sub-plot with Kutpitia and Dilnavaz to support the main story about Gustad Noble. This sub-plot, though apparently marginal, is of a significant structural value and the motifs of disintegration and reconciliation of the novel are combined in it. The sub plot might seem to be rather fragmented at first but in the end, it supports the development of the themes of the novel. It is Dilnavaz who makes Sohrab at peace with his father and restores sanity to the turmoil of the battle between Gustad and his son:

He is your father. He will love you and desire you the best he can always love you and want the best of you (Mistry 321).

This is the point of the destruction of the wall between the father and son that is an important turning point in the novel. The female characters in the novel that include Dilnavaz, Roshan, and Miss Kutpitia, however, are very passive and static. They are trapped in the traditional roles and their lives are not representative of the contemporary liberation which women are supposed to be enjoying. It is noted by Nilufer E. Bharucha (1996):

“Do not journey at all... They remain stationary while the world around them moves and changes” and are even “denied the knowledge of their own stultification and repression” (18).

This indicates the wider theme of how male views are shaping historical meaning where the women are placed in the periphery of the bigger historical story. Another theme used by Mistry is that of religion as being a binding element. In the novel, Gustad chooses to convert the wall of the Khodadad Building, which is a latrine in a community to a holy place by painting it with different gods of different religions. Mistry shares in the welcoming perspective which he holds on religion by the lines of the pavement artist who is quoted saying:

"I do not like to undermine the faith of anybody... Miracle, magic, mechanical trick, coincidence—whatever it is, it's all right, so long as it assists" (Mistry 289).

Rohinton Mistry provides various aspects in *Such a Long Journey* to establish how the past affected the events in the present and evolved the theme issues in this novel. Among the notable ones is the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri collected by Dr. Paymaster, who remembers how the death of Shastri had unsettled several conspiracy theories:

"Some people said he had been murdered by the Pakistanis, and others thought that it was a Russian conspiracy... Others went as far as accusing the supporters of the new Prime Minister to have poisoned Shastri" (Mistry 14).

Religion and superstition are also a great aspect of the novel, particularly in the character of Dilnavaz, who engages in rituals to have the evil out of his way:

Dilnavaz with her reflex gestures to say off evil in the event someone mentions something nasty (Mistry 4).

This superstition is in contrast with the more realistic belief systems of the men in the novel, although Mistry presents the readers with the opposition of two equally valid belief systems, which helps believe that both of them are ways of coping in a world of absolute chaos. Both Jimmy and Dinshawji are great storytellers and their stories which mostly include humour and exaggeration, give comic relief and also represent the plight of post-partitions India. The Tiresias of the novel is Peerbhoy Paanwala, a local paanwala, who sheds some light about the characters using his racy, multiracial narratives. His narration is not limited by the genres, as he invents the mixture of tragedy, comedy, and satire:

"It was not tragedy, comedy, or history... Nor was it epic or mock-heroic... It was an item which could not fit the genre or description" (Mistry 306).

Tehmul-Lungraa, in his shambling walk and diseased mind is a figure of a divine fool in Such a Long Journey. His innocence as a child combined with his involvement with Gustad reminds the innocence of other characters in novels such as Prince Myshkin of *The Idiot* by Dostoyevsky. Both characters, who also appear to be too good to be in their corrupt worlds, shun the false words that are heard by them. Nevertheless, as opposed to Myshkin, the innocence of Tehmul is troubled by his clumsy sexual actions, including his crotch-rubbing acts, something that frightens Dilnavaz. This naivety and unease contrasts with his character and makes it more complex. According to Peter Morey, Tehmul, just like Jimmy, is one of the hollow men of Mistry, who is obsessed with shadows and doubles as seen in the text. The innocence of Tehmul is the same as the downgrading of Jimmy, both characters represent emptiness and decay which is symbolized by the shadow of the powerful Bilimoria (Mistry 267). Likewise, Dinshawji is a shadow of his previous self, which brings out the theme of degradation:

"The man who had laughed and sung... was not the man who stood before her" (Mistry 87).

The theme of replacement is also developed in the form of Roshans doll which serves as a sex replacement partner to Tehmul, a discussion that the novel has on the artificial substitution of human bond by a doll. The doll is an icon of the rejection of physical intimacy by Tehmul and this motif is transferred to the Mount Mary church where surrogate body parts are auctioned to those who want miraculous therapy. These are the elements that form a semi-surrealist story that serves to highlight the conflict between natural life and artificial replacements (Mistry 84). The life of Gustad is in a state of constant fight and the loss of his dreams. He loses hope of his eldest son Sohrab and the family bonds start falling apart. In her scrawny way Dilnavaz thinks back to their struggles:

"We must be pointed. Yet Gustad has long enough been victimized... What are we now that we are patient all these years? Is this how it will end? Woe, woe only woe" (Mistry 52).

Putting up a stoic determination, Gustad takes on life full throttle despite the increasingly tough pressure in his life, the romantic difficulties of Darius, and the health problems of Roshan, which portray a characteristic of a common man.

The story of Gustad Noble, in *Such a Long Journey*, is enhanced by a circus-like pavement artist, whose contempt against routine is a reinforcement of the main theme of the novel human transition- between past and present, between innocence and experience. The novel is also depicted as a story of every human being and all three epigraphs of the novel refer to the same theme: the Shahnama of Firdausi reminds about the greatness of the Persian empire and the present state of the Parsis; the Shahnama of T.S. Eliot refers to the Zoroastrian religion and the *Journey of the Magi*; and the lines of Tagore in *Gitanjali* refer to the journey of the Parsis towards adaptation and self-discovery (Mistry 1). These epigraphs highlight the theme of the archetypal journey in the Parsi writing, the journey of an imposed assimilation to the ultimate security and identity.

Zoroastrianism requires deliberate action to combat evil and not to be an ascetic, but to be active in the world. In an identical manner, the experience of Gustad is an indication of his battle with the realities of the world, just like the allegory of the cave by Plato. The cave in the book *Republic* by Plato is a representation of ignorance, where chained prisoners are only able to view shadows. Gustad is also another prisoner of the dark cave he has created himself, whereas the blackout paper is blocking the light of reality and transformation

"The earthly and celestial light locked out by the blackout paper... his own fear of change, pursuing the shadows that have only made threats because he is not willing to look at them in full" (Mistry 259).

The same philosophical predicament is reflected on the journey that Gustad takes as he is unable to face the ugly truths due to the illusion of security. The novel bears conceptual resemblance to Platonism and the Zoroastrianism religion, however, Mistry provides a Zoroastrian revision of Plato. Gustad is not an ideal society, unlike the philosopher-kings, but a common man who is forced to live in a world of mendacity and political corruption. Mistry emphasizes that one should have idealism, be it in domestic life or politics, as a source of surmounting the path in life. Whether it is a dream of domestic life, which Noble can never be, or even the conviction that politics should not be driven by self-interest but by social responsibility.

Linda Hutcheon (1988) describes that the novel *Gossip* is a mix of history and fiction, which is characteristic of historiographic metafiction. The novel *Gossip* opens the options of other interpretations of the historical events like the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri and Feroze

Gandhi, which may have been conspiracies. The words of Ghulam Mohammad concerning the revenge and the power of the ruling elite only add to this mixture of history and fiction:

I am a patient. Her existence is as simple to wipe out as that of Bilibhoy (Mistry 32).

Jaydip Sinh Dodiya (2019) remarks on the experience of the trip, that Gustad feels free and forgiving when he comes back to Delhi, an inward trip that brings self awareness. This change is expressed by the last epigraph of the novel by Tagore in his *Gitanjali*:

"And when the old words die on the tongue, new melodies come into the heart, and where the old ways are forgotten, new nation is made with its marvel (Mistry 1).

This epigraph can be seen as the symbol of the changing consciousness of Gustad, who is on his new endless way to the knowledge. The context shows the displacement and hardships of the Parsi community that had travelled in Persia back to India and settled in a new place and exercised their faith. In the case of Gustad, he has no heavenly intervention to provide justice or comfort to the end of his voyage. He experiences anxiety, depression, and discouragement that are likely to press him to his death but he comes out unharmed and does not sink into cynicism and upholds his humanity. His experience is a story of ethnicity and a community that is close to extinction struggling to survive in a world where misery and happiness are bound together. Gustad is at first short-sighted but at the end he develops complete eyesight and, in fact, he is a participant in the eternal struggle of Good and Evil, and his survival is the victory of Zoroastrian faith.

The journey motif explored in the middle of the book of *Such a Long Journey* highlights the theme of displacement that is inherent in the life of a diaspora. The path of Gustad is a mental one, full of excruciating pain, suffering, frustration, and estrangement, similar to those that are displaced physically. Gustad is not physically exiled, but he is an outcast in his own land, a minority, a stranger in his own land, with all the neglect of society, the tyranny of the Emergency. His experience is a reflection of the diasporic experience in its acuity and pathos, the feeling of being displaced and disenfranchised in his own land.

But the metamorphosis in Gustad comes in when he comes out with newfound sense of clarity and sanity and this saves him on the verge of despair. His quest is turned into the road of self-acceptance and reconciliation with his past and present. Through repentance and reconciliation, he is able to heal the wounds of disappointments of the past and eventually reconciles with the fact of the surrounding world. Forgiveness as a virtue is also one of the

most obvious in the novel, which eventually leads Gustad to his own personal development and tranquillity.

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