

## **Palate and Past: Gustad's Culinary Nostalgia in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey***

**Mrs. J. Pauline Jeevitha,**

(Ph. D. Research Scholar( Part- time)

Reg. No. 20123154012040, S.T. Hindu College, Centre for Research, Nagercoil, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627 012, Tamilnadu, India.)

**Dr. S. Geetha,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri. K.G.S. Arts College, Srivaikundam. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627 012, Tamilnadu, India.)

**Dr. M. Mahesh,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627 012, Tamilnadu, India.)

### **Abstract:**

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born Canadian writer whose writings carry an authentic voice of a Mumbai person and an Indo-Persian infused upbringing at the backdrop of a country struggling to assert itself after the departure of its English master. Food plays a vital role in each and every culture around the world. This paper attempts to bring out how memory and food are inseparable as experienced by the novel's lead character Mr. Gustad Noble in *Such A Long Journey*. His first attempted work on a novel, *Such A Long Journey* won a wide readership and was even translated into twenty-five languages. Parsi cuisine has an infusion of Gujarati and Persian flavoured dishes. Gustad's childhood memories become incomplete if food is cut-off from the list.

**Keywords:** Food, Childhood, Memory, Parsi, Culture and Chicken.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such A Long Journey* was published in 1991. The novel begins with citations from Firdausi's *Shah-Nama*, T.S. Eliot's '*Journey of the Magi*' and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*.

A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year

For a journey, and such a long journey... ( T.S.Eliot)

Rohinton Mistry's out-sketch of his characters begin with their past that was once glorious and in its proper places but the deterioration began with the change in time and fortune. Gustad Noble had a joyous past with a fortunate family and a steady economic state but his downfall began when his iconic grandfather made a wrong move by making Gustad's uncle in-charge of his properties while Gustad's father had inherited the talent and genuine interest in securing the family business and trade. This novel captures the journey of Gustad as a faithful friend to Major Jimmy and a caring father to ailing Roshan and to Sohrab who holds the key to get out of their present state and complete his course in IIT intertwined with the political turmoil of Indo-Pakistan war. Being a middle-class Parsi and a bank clerk he feels the pressure that he had was beyond his might to bear but learns to flow with the ebb and flow of the tide of events and emerges victoriously after the problems get resolved and he gains a new perspective as his black charted window panes are finally freed from the panic of being struck with air rides.

Gustad Noble felt elated when his son Sohrab passed his entrance to IIT. His joy continued even in his dream at night, he reflected upon the childhood days spent with his grandparents. He dreamt of fresh chicken brought home and fattened for two days before getting drenched in sauce by his grandmother. His association of food with memory made him recreate the joyous moment by buying a fresh chicken home to be fattened for two days to celebrate Roshan's birthday and Sohrab's victory in the exams. Food becomes an emotion when associated with memory.

“When Gustad was a little boy, live chickens were standard procedure in his father's house. Grandma would have it no other way. Not for her the scraggy fowl brought home slaughtered and plucked and gutted. Gustad remembered them arriving in a covered basket balanced on the head

of the servant...‘Chicken if you buy’ she would say when praised for her delicious cooking, ‘then you must buy alive and squawking, *jeevii-jaagti*, or don’t buy at all...feed best grain, the very best. Always remember: what goes in chicken-stomach, at the end comes back to our stomach. After two days prepare the pot, light the stove, get *masalaready*. Then slaughter, clean and cook. Quick-quick-quick, no wasting time.’ (SLJ 19, 20)

Gustad Noble wished to live out the unforgettable moment once again by buying a fresh chicken from Crawford market and trusted on his wife’s cooking skills to give back the same emotion to his children.

“The brown sauce, in which the chicken swam, was perfect, as Gustad had predicted. The aroma, said Dinshawji, could make even a corpse at the Tower of Silence sit up with an appetite, it was that wonderful...Besides chicken, there was a vegetable stew made of carrots, peas, potatoes and yam, liberally spiced with coriander, cumin, ginger, garlic, turmeric and whole green chillies. And there was rice, studded with cloves and cinnamon sticks: fragrant *basmati* rice...” (SLJ, 45)

Steve Grant, a London based nutritionist says “Emotions/feelings are an extremely strong trigger for food choices. From a young age food becomes connected to a variety of emotions and social interactions. Whether sad, happy, celebrating, commemorating, lonely, angry etc food is often used to support or cope with these emotions and circumstances. This relationship can start well before we are even in control of our own diet, influenced by our parents choices for us.”Gustad’s past plays a major role in his present.

Rohinton Mistry has also captured the significance of drinking tea, an inevitable part of each and every Indian while describing the chaiwala echoing his usual refrain in a railway platform, “Hot chai! Hot chai!..Drink from saucer,drink from cup! Forget your sorrow, drink it up! Train will run – today? tomorrow? Drink one saucer, forget your sorrow!” (SLJ, 256).

Gustad Noble had a gulp of the chai at the railway station thinking about his usual cup of tea with his wife Mrs. Dilnavaz. Drinking tea relieves stress and has always believed to render an emotional assistance. His journey to visit Major Jimmy in jail made the journey even harder as he had a turbulent mind ever since he received the letter from Major and his connection with PM Indira Gandhi and the money scandal. While he unwrapped the parcel of sandwiches prepared by his wife in train, he suddenly got reminded of his colleague at bank Mr. Dinshawji and his sandwiches for lunch, ‘He opened Dilnavaz’s packet of sandwiches later, when it was almost seven o’ clock. Omelette. Dinshawji’s favourite. How I used to tease him. Two sandwiches every day, for thirty years’ (SLJ, 259)

In the select novel, Rohinton Mistry has captured the intricate connection between memory and food. His writing gives a slice of respite as we sip our tea and embark in our own individual journey in life.

**Work Cited:**

1. Mistry, Rohinton. *Such A Long Journey*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006. Print.
2. Steve Grand Health. ‘Why We Eat: Food, Emotions & Connection’  
<<https://www.stevegranthealth.com/articles/why-we-eat-food-emotions-connection/>>