

The Problems and Difficulties of being gentle and noble: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's "Such A Long Journey"

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Abstract

Gustad in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, (1987) is presented as an individual classical tragic hero who passes from 'happiness to misery.' He has to struggle against heavy odds which he tackles with placid serenity. Many things do not escape the novelist's serious concern. He also cherishes the values of friendship, condemns the scourge of war and also denounces the hypocritical political leaders who have eaten the vitals of the nation. In a post-modernist tone, he refrains from becoming a political propagandist. He exposes the political and social ills in India. Gustad's suffering is no suffering in abstraction. Through this novel, Mistry hints that no happiness will exist for ever. Above everything, it is only destiny that Gustad found at the helm of affairs. Like Oedipus, he surrendered to the will of Providence. His dignity and greatness helped him to withstand the tortures heaped on him critical realist so far as the treatment of social reality is concerned. With the help of this method, his ideology came out to project the kind of society he wants to be a part of the novelist's departure from the emphasis on the representation of the psychic being of the character reveals the inadequacy of the novel form in the post-modernist period. This novel is a successful work of art in which a variety of values crowd generating a classical structure par excellence. Gustad's devotion to his family, loyalty to his friends and love for his Parsi community were continually tested through a series of events and situations. Ultimately, loyalty and journeying constituted two major contrasting patterns in his life.

Introduction:

Such a Long Journey is one of the remarkable and best works by Rohinton Mistry which portrays the realistic conditions and political history of Indian society especially the life of the Parsi community before and after independence. Mistry has well studied the history, social and political condition of India during his stay in Bombay and has adapted it in the novel, which is interesting and traditionally significant. The present paper is an innocent and honest attempt to attract the attention of the readers towards life of Gustad; the protagonist of the novel "**Such a Long Journey**" whose life is full of ups and downs and he has to suffer a lot; although he a gentle man.

Jasbir Jain says that,

Rohinton Mistry's work raises a whole lot of other questions specifically related to the 'homeland' and political memory. Neither nostalgia nor memory in itself can account for this rootedness and preoccupation with the homeland and the environment boundaries of the city of birth. (qtd in Dhodiya 42)

Objectives:

The purpose of this research paper is to attract the attention of the readers towards the simplicity of Gusted whose behavior is very noble and gentle. The research scholar further tells that he has to struggle against heavy odds which he tackles with placid serenity. Many things do not escape the novelist's serious concern. He also cherishes the values of friendship, condemns the scourge of war and also denounces the hypocritical political leaders who have eaten the vitals of the nation.

Such a Long Journey:

Such a Long Journey is an imaginative story which explores the life and anguish of the middle-class Parsi people. Amrijit Singh says, "**Such a Long Journey**" is the story of Gustad Noble, the little man who holds on to his dignity, strength, and humanity in a sweltering tide of disappointment, confusion, betrayal and corruption" (214). The author describes the pitiable circumstances and the melancholic story of Gustad Noble, who is the protagonist of the novel. He belongs to the middle-class Parsi community, who worked as a clerk in a bank. Being a clerk, he has to face many problems in life. He was a dedicated family man, works very hard to uphold his family's financial situation. Noble was a father of three children, elder son Sohrab, youngest son Darius and Roshan, his daughter. He lived in the Khodadad building with his family where most of the Parsis reside. Major Jimmy Bilimoria and Dinshawji are the faithful friends of him who also lived along with the Noble family in the Khodadad building. His style of writing is very simple.

Parsi communities:

Parsi communities are shaken by the rise of Shiv Sena in Bombay, the party promises to give job for the middle-class people. The party is against the South Indian immigrants, typically immigrants from Tamil Nadu especially the job seekers. The party Shiv Sena in the novel is despised by the Parsi people as the supporters of the Shiv Sena ill-treated the individuals of the Parsi community as a "Parsi Crow-Eaters". Furthermore offending the community's funeral cremations, Dinshawji and Gustadare frightened that the Parsis might become "second-class citizens" in the future. Gustad says, "No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America-twice as good as the white man to get half as much"(SLJ 7). The novel charmingly reveals the certain political conflicts which affected the life of ordinary middle-class people. Dr. Paymaster says,

Our beloved country is a patient with disease at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rose-water over it to hide the smell of decaying tissue is useless. Fine words and promises will not cure the patient. The decaying part must be removed. You see, the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the decaying government at the Centre is removed. (SLJ 313).

The novel is more than a tale of one individual's life. It is the microcosm of a community that is an image of a 'tribe' invented through the imagination of the story teller.

The novel narrates and renarrates stories of the country, culture and community woven around certain points of time and place. Characters like Gustad, Dinshawji and Billimoria are vehicles for conveying ethnic, communal and national consciousness.

To quote from the novel: “This may be but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your son of God was even born, a thousand years before the Buddha, two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam” (SLJ, 24).

Also, this novel sums up the fears and anxieties of the Parsi community. As a community, Parsis have not only lived peacefully in India but also contributed to its development in their own way. Gustad felt that minorities have no future in India. He said: “No future for minorities with all these Fascist Shivsena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the Black people in America twice as good as the white man to get half as much. How could the mute Sohrab understand this” (SLJ, 55).

Various other characters belonging to the Parsi community in the novel also express their anguish at the changing pattern of communal relationships and the increasing intolerance. This enriches the ideational intent of the novel.

The racist and communal forces lead agitations finally resulting in massive violence. The individual traits of the Parsi community are given authentic expression through minute descriptions of rituals, and their impact are interpreted by individual characters. Mistry, with almost a caricaturing instinct dwells on individual idiosyncrasies and habits of speech. The Parsi – Gujarati words, interspersed throughout the novel, also give colour and substance to Mistry’s portrayal of Parsi life. The Parsi community is intensely conscious of its distinctive private identity and also aware of its place in the Indian national scene.

Mistry has exploited some historical highlights of post – independence era to record the way his community reacted to them or were affected by them.

In the novel, the sudden and uncalled-for rebuff of Sohrab not only shatters all hopes of Gustad but also makes a surprising turn in the later course of the novel. There appears the theme of father- son hostility. Mistry has earned critical appreciation for his vivid and realistic portrayal of Indian society especially the Parsi community. The microcosm of Indian society that Mistry writes about in his fiction is often in conflict at an individual as well as a larger level. Mistry’s fiction traces the inextricable patterns of behavior of various Parsi individuals who struggle to find space and roots in the main stream.

A Fine Balance (1995) is considered a socio – political, cultural, historical novel more in the nature of a documentary about the situation and lives of the people that inhabit the novel. Mistry exposes the lives of the four main protagonists to focus on the mechanism of political governance that prevails in modern India and its impact on individual lives.

The novel is filled with brutality, discrimination, injustice, lack of opportunity suffered by the average citizen and the despair and revulsion they cause in the minds of people who find expectations and hopes belied amidst heaps of fresh promises clothed in rhetorical but empty phrases. The novel offers a realistic, if painful documentation of India.

The novel's four protagonists represent the commonest of the commons in India. The novel is basically a study about human endeavor for dignity and the endless struggle of human beings to strike a fine balance between their own desires, performance and fulfillment.

Mistry traces the story of the lives of these people against the sociopolitical background. Each of the four protagonists is a victim of his social, familial and communal conditioning. Each aspires to improve and change his lot but finds himself pulled down by hostile circumstances. The protagonists view life according to their own experiences. As a diasporic writer and Paris, Mistry is sensitive to the plight of those who do not belong to the main stream.

The story in *A Fine Balance* revolves around a widow who is living alone in the city of Bombay. Maneck Kohlah, a sensitive Parsi boy, a student from a hillside town in the shadow of the Himalayas, whose family had lost all its wealth in the Partition of India is a paying guest with Dina. The two untouchables, Ishvar Darji and his nephew Om Prakash, the tailors employed by Dina, struggle to rise above their designated caste roles. They also have to endure the atrocities of the so-called high class people. They offer a glimpse of rural India.

Ishtar and Om decided to migrate to Bombay and became exiles by choice, since their entire family had been mercilessly murdered. They also felt that the migration would really transform their lives. Their life in Bombay did not meet their own expectations. They were mistaken for beggars. The novelist also describes their inability to adjust in an alien town after leaving their village. They really become beggars in the end, felled by the hostile socio-political climate engendered by the Internal Emergency.

Social circumstances and a sense of isolation paradoxically brought them together, providing a link to survive. Their miseries, joys and sorrows made them feel that life is only a fine balance between hope and despair. The rich and varied character gallery of this novel portrays the plight of the poor from the Parsi community. The novel presents the pain and suffering of the poorest among India's teeming millions. Mistry narrates the story with rhetorical flourishes and Freudian insights. Human experience is anatomized as put under an ironic microscope.

Poverty drives the untouchables to depend upon the higher castes to feed their family. The Thakurs obtained cheap labour from the lower caste villagers.

Again, Dukhi Mochi accepted to powder one sack full of chilies alone, for a meager wage though the Thakur asked him "Can you finish that by sunset? Or maybe I should call two men."(AFB, 103).

Summing Up:

To sum up; the research scholar comes to the point that **Such a Long Journey** is an imaginative story which explores the life and anguish of the middle-class Parsi people. Amrijit Singh says, "**Such a Long Journey**" is the story of Gustad Noble, the little man who holds on to his dignity, strength, and humanity in a sweltering tide of disappointment, confusion, betrayal and corruption" (214). The author describes the pitiable circumstances and the melancholic story of Gustad Noble, who is the protagonist

of the novel. He belongs to the middle-class Parsi community, who worked as a clerk in a bank. Being a clerk, he has to face many problems in life. The novel clearly explores the socio-political issues which affect the lives of the characters and also the anxieties about their future as minority people. Mistry has effectively intertwined components of Parsi society and religion in his writing. It signifies different classes, professions, caste, and daily lives of the common parsi people in a unique way. He utilize his writing as a weapon against the exploiters and giving the reader information about the political exploitation and its consequence on the common middle-class people. In one of the interviews conducted by Ali Lakhani, Mistry says that “a new country is revealed with its wonders, life is a journey without destination. Sort of like a wall that goes on and on with pictures” (1-2). Such a Long Journey thus beautifully reveals the huge picture of the Parsi community in India. In this paper; the researcher scholar explains that life is full of ups and downs but we should not disappointed by our failures.

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