

## JOURNEY OF VICTIMIZATION IN ROHINTON'S MISTRY'S SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

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### ABSTRACT

*Such A Long Journey contemplates the consequences of the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 which led to so many national and international issues along with the birth and the creation of a new and independent country Bangladesh. The year 1971 proved to be very fatal in the history of India as it faced simultaneous wars with Pakistan and China. The wars had drastic and life-threatening consequences on the lives of Indians particularly poor and middle class people. The novel Such a Long Journey is a historical record of the happenings in a small middle-class Indian Parsi family. The novel is a realistic attempt to unearth the socio-political and economic influences on a middle class family that was already in pressure of being a minority class in Indian society. The minorities in any country remain burdened and threatened under the dominance of majority which have far-reaching influence on their day-today life. The minorities are the soft-targets of exploitation by the dominants and during violent periods the oppression aggravates. Such a Long Journey endeavors to represent the life of a Parsi family during the violent and volatile era of war.*

**Keywords:** Life-Threatening Consequences, Economic Influences, Middle Class Family, Minorities.

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### Introduction

“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 environmental precepts of the city of birth. It also not nearly the fact of being more at home or having a more intimate relationship with the space back there. It is more than all these, a projection of the individual character, a gesture of expanding the memory to include both the specific and universal.” (Barucha, 2003, 11)

Rohinton Mistry through *Such a Long Journey* has recreated the life of the ordinary Parsis exhaustively delineating the minor and major issues living in Khodadad Building in *Such A Long Journey*. The protagonist, Gustad Noble, an ordinary man is facing the consequences of being a member of minor community with only struggle and no success in life. Like any ordinary human being Gustad has modest and moderate aspirations from life. However, his life is a bundle of troubles and misfortunes. His elder son disobediently discarded him and his daughter is sick inexplicably. The middle-aged Gustad is anxious of the uncertainties and financial security in life, moreover, due to social conditioning he became emotionally disintegrated with self and the others around him. Rohinton Mistry has comprehensively brought forth the struggle of poor family for the want of basic things like food and other essentials. The economic disparity has always been an issue in India, the rich become richer and the poor the poorer. The large portion of the society is still facing the problem of shortage of ration. The socio-economic and cultural life of the rich is completely different to that the poor in the Indian society. In such a miserable

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condition the news of the war intrude like a bomb into Khodadad Building. Out of frustration, financial insecurity and fear of starvation Gustad gets involved into a political intrigue with Major Jimmy Billimoria, wherein both Gustad and Billimoria have been victimized by the Prime Ministerial intervention in a financial scam. The involvement of Major Billimoria and financial scam forms the sub-plot of the novel discussing the actual scandal taken place during the reign of Indira Gandhi government in 1970s. The scam becomes the center of attraction in the novel disturbing the entire life of both Gustad and Billimoria. In this way the novel recounts the real incident portraying the human struggle for life and dignity.

Mistry intends to show the aptness of title by showing the journey of the common individuals in search of honor and dignity in life amidst corrupt and untrustworthy political atmosphere in 1970s. The title relates to T. S. Eliot's *The Journey of Magi* wherein characters struggle to find the birthplace of Jesus Christ. In *Such A Long Journey* it is struggle and suffering of the protagonist to find safe and secure life for himself and his family. The novelist portrays both physical and psychological suffering of the protagonist that is both intense and serious. He poignantly postulates that in a modern age it is not possible for a common man from poor and middle class strata to fulfill his desires and aspirations. Gustad experiences the same picture wherever he tries to realize his dreams he encounters with difficulties and obstacles. The story of Gustad is the story of every other individual in the contemporary period. The novel is the best example of how in modern age a common man can be victimized at the hands of corrupt, self-centered and intensively dishonest politicians. In this connection Gustad becomes a prototype of a classical tragic hero. The novel, simultaneously signets how the financial crisis at the national level can turn the lives of common people topsy-turvy.

Gustad Noble, is an ordinary bank employee and a family man with three children. When the novel opens Gustad is shown suffering the economic crisis. Presently he is living with his family in a Parsi Residential colony of Khodadad Building in Mumbai. He is fortunate enough to have few good friends like Major Jimmy Billimoria and Dinshawji who at times understand and console him in his difficult times. Although, in financial crunches Gustad manages to have some dreams and aspirations towards life. His present condition makes him nostalgic numerous times about his past good and economically days. In thinking about his past he suffers psychologically and physically making him worried about his and his family's future. His present condition is reflexive of his current suffering. Gustad's life is full of miseries, misfortunes and difficulties. Every new day brings new difficulties for him; at familial level his son Sohrab disobeys him for almost everything, his daughter Roshan's illness is a never ending mystery for him and the want of everything from ration to every basic things had converted his life into hell. Sohrab's refusal to join IIT, and the sudden disappearance of close friend major Billimoria have added more miseries in his life. In such a turmoil and confusing atmosphere one day he receives a news of his another close friend Dinshawji's illness and sudden and tragic demise. All these things create a lot of complications in his life. A common middle-class person like Gustad cannot withstand to such misfortunes in life. The characters of Rohinton Mistry are common individual who face a series of problems in their lives. By showing the common individuals living in Khodadad Building, Mistry makes it a realistic novel, and the readers get the firsthand experience of life being witnessed at their next door. Gustad Noble, Dinshawji, Major Billimoria, Dilnavaz, Tehmul Lungraa all come from middle class families are shown facing economic hardships in their lives due to the financial crisis at the national level. It is social conditioning that is more responsible for the suffering of these characters than their day-to-day problems. The final stroke of suffering for Gustad comes in the form of a parcel sent by Major Billimoria containing the sum of ten lakh rupees, it is fatal blow for the protagonist as he hides the amount from the government and undergoes a lot of suffering in life.

The beginning of the novel is very smooth, Gustad initially is the proud father eagerly awaiting his son Sohrab's admission to the IIT. It was a proud moment for him and a kind of relief that he is going get as he hopes that his family would come out of financial hardships soon after the completion of his son's education. He plans to celebrate the occasion on the ninth birthday of his daughter Roshan. He invites his best friend Dinshawji for the celebration of the birthday, he brings a live chicken for the party, but things suddenly go wrong with the disapproval of Sohrab to join IIT. On the same day Sohrab becomes violent and turns down the proposal of joining the IIT. Not only Gustad's dream of economic stability but the father-son bond also breaks into pieces that day. Since then Gustad and Sohrab are never seen on the good terms. Sohrab's sad mission to IIT was like an oasis in the desert for the family in that hard conditions, a ray of hope for future. But the rejection on the part of Sohrab put an end to all humanly aspirations. The novel brilliantly relates the life of a common man where dreams can be shattered at any point of time and things can go utterly wrong, yet the common man does not stop seeing

the dreams. Gustad's story is the story all common men living in the society. They dream of the good days, better future but the future has something else stored for them. There are hardly few examples where these dreams meet with the success. IIT for Gustad was:

- ... the Indian Institute of Technology became the 'promised land'. It was El Dorado and Shangri-La, it was Atlantis and Camelot, it was Xandau and Oz. It was the home of the Holy Grail. And all things would be given end all things would be possible and all things would come to pass for he who journeyed there and emerged with the sacred chalice. (Mistry, *Such*, 1991: 66)

Sohrab's admission to IIT was probably the only hope for Gustad to regain his past glory and come out of the economic crunches that he was in. He wanted to live once again in a same glory among the Parsis that he used to enjoy in the past. But suddenly everything had become vague for him. He does not understand what kind of life Sohrab is going to lead by denouncing admission to the IIT:

- What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to?
- 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
- How could he make Sohrab understand this?(Mistry, *Such*, 1991: 55)

The hardships were continually knocking his door one after another. Recently the Municipality had given him the notice regarding the demolish of the compound wall to the Khodadad Building. It was 300 feet wall protecting the building from outside intruders. The wall both includes and excludes. It protects the Parsis community from the ingress of the engulfing Indian world. However, it also makes this world isolationist. (Barucha, 2003: 123.) This was supplemented by the illness of his daughter Roshan. She was suffering from chronic dysentery which caused a heavy burden to his pocket. At this point there was nothing to feel proud for Gustad except his glorious past. He was completely surrounded by the socio-economic conditions that created tremendous pressure on his mind and soul.

His grandfather had made a fortune in furniture business while his father, a bookseller, was deceived by his own alcoholic brother and since then the family was facing the financial issues. Gustad a bank employee could not do well that could provide a secure future for his family. He was relegated to live an ordinary life of a middle class person. Despite numerous difficulties in life Gustad manages to have a dream of arranging a bookcase with the help of his son Sohrab. But that too seemed far-reaching to him. He often have a feeling of a proverb, 'Man proposes and God Disposes'. This is the condition of a middle-class person everywhere in the world. He has to sacrifice the smallest of the pleasure due to want of everything. Mistry is very minute to portray the life of a common man who has so many dreams that remain unrealized in life-time. With the salary of the bank clerk, it was not possible for him to give his family a life of honor and dignity. It was, therefore, that he was anticipating from his son to regain the glory of the family. But the disobedience on the part of Sohrab had put an end to his aspirations of better and economically sound future for his family.

Gustad is unable to convince his son for choosing a bright future breaks him within and makes him hostile about Sohrab. Rohinton Mistry, through hugh, the character of Gustad likes to bring forth the feelings of the minority community like Parsis, the feeling of insecurity, anxiety and helplessness in modern age. The only forte of a minority in a country like India can be financial stability which was at stake in the present conditions. Rohinton Mistry observes this as:

- ...loss is essential; loss is part and parcel of that necessary calamity called life. Mind you, I'm not complaining. Thanks to some inexplicable universal guiding force, it is always the worthless things we lose - slough off, like a molting snake. Losing and losing again, is the very basis of the process, til all we are left with is the bare essence of human existence... ( Mistry, R. Web)

Through, Gustad Mistry attempts to give voice to the repressed minorities who often have the feeling of 'otherness where the other communities are in majority. The word, 'other', is a great insult for the minorities for the majorities often remind them of not belonging to the country. In such an insecure condition any minority like to be financially stable for he does not like to spread his hands before anyone. Charu Chandra Mishra has pointed out the actual condition of Gustad Noble, "It is his only chance to carve out a space for himself and his family in a country where politics of regionalism has named them 'other'/ Gustad suffers at three layers, the loss of the son, economic delusion and no hope of better life.

In this way the journey in *Such a Long Journey* takes the whole of its characters' lives to settle the issues which finally remain unsettled. All the characters in novel come from middle-class background and have same fortune as that of Gustad. Everyone undergoes same struggle financial, physical and psychological as is faced by the protagonist. Almost everyone has the same things stored in their fortune. They face pain, agony, disappointment and frustration of all sorts. Gustad's suffering is the representatives of contemporary middle-class man who has to undergo anguish to realize their aspirations. The honest efforts of Gustad to overcome the problems of life are representative of his Parsi community.

Rohinton Mistry, thus, portrays the absurdist world with no fruitful actions on the part of his characters. His characters are unnecessarily involved in meaningless activity that do not help in bettering their lives. Mistry through his characters exhibits the theory of absurdity wherein actions are meaningless and purposeless. He shows his characters to be the mere puppets in the hands of destiny where no good things happen with them. In his novels we prominently get encountered with the past and present and past is always shown glorifying to the present. Thus, the characters of Mistry are the true representatives of his contemporary period. His characters more often were the victims of socio-political and economic surroundings.

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