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## SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

### Rohinton Mistry's

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#### Part I

#### Objectives

- To understand what is 'Diaspora' and the literature associated with it
- To know about the author, *Rohinton Mistry*
- To understand the complexities, issues and themes in his novel, *Such a Long Journey*

#### Warm-up questions

1. Do you know or have heard of people who have left their homeland or country and migrated to a different country?
2. Do you think that a person who migrates is less of an Indian than one who is living here?
3. What, in your opinion, are the problems that a migrant writer faces in the country of her/his migration?
4. Can you name some writers of Indian origin who have settled in other countries?

Before embarking upon a study of the author and his novel, it would be worthwhile to know the meaning of 'diaspora' and its effect on the writer in particular and literature in general. The term '**diaspora**' is a Greek word meaning "*a scattering* [of seeds]". In English it refers to the movement of any group of people who share a common [ethnic](#) identity and were either forced to leave or left their homeland of their own accord. The group, then settled in places which were often far removed from its previous settlement. The first mention of a 'diaspora' occurs as a result of exile in the Bible in [Deuteronomy](#) 28:25 "thou shalt be a *dispersion* in all kingdoms of the earth". 'Diaspora' began to be seen as a movement of Jews specifically who were exiled by the Babylonians from Israel in 607 BC and at other times too. They are referred to as the Jewish Diaspora. Another mass exodus took place when Africans were exported to the West as slaves. These dislocations were forced evictions of people from their homelands. After the second World War, migration became voluntary and a global phenomenon. By 1950s, the word 'diaspora' came into usage in the English language when people in significant numbers left their homelands to settle in foreign countries.

Unlike the Jews who faced religious persecution in their homeland and were forced to leave their country, the Indians who left their country to settle elsewhere did so voluntarily. They went abroad for higher education or better economic prospects. Some of them went as employees of their British masters, still others like women left their country because of marriage. The writings of the Indian Diaspora have received a great deal of attention and critical acclaim. Writers such as Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri - to name a few - have been recipients of international literary awards.

Generally speaking, diasporic literature is concerned with two relationships: **one** with the motherland which gives rise to nostalgia, memories and reminiscences, and the **other**, the new relationship with the adopted country and its people which gives rise to conflicts and split personalities. That is why such writers speak of alienation, loneliness, rootlessness, exile, cultural conflicts and at times of a sense of rejection by the host country. When their efforts at assimilation prove difficult and at variance with their own cultural beliefs, their writings contain descriptions of 'back home' which, in turn, may become romantic outpourings of nostalgia and longing. What is distinctive about the Indian diaspora is that the Indians settled abroad do not share a common religion, language, cuisine, dress etc. This diversity is reflected in their

literature. The cultural baggage that they carry is characteristic of the region that they come from and their descriptions of their homeland differ in every way. Jhumpa Lahiri will describe the vermilion (*sindoor*) applied in the parting of hair in a way that no other non-Bengali writer can. The way Rohinton Mistry describes Parsi habits and customs is unique to him.

Another quality that characterizes the Indian diasporic writer is the way in which s/he copes with the new community or country. If the person is a first generation migrant, s/he is obsessed with the home left behind and haunted by a feeling of rootlessness and alienation. A second generation migrant would find coping far easier. However, they too face rejection and experience alienation as they can never become part of the white society like the white-skinned people who have migrated from countries such as Germany, Russia, Poland etc. According to Robert Stead, a Canadian poet, “Canada is like a big melting pot where all the races are churned, and emerge ‘Canadian’ except “the yellow and the brown”” (Varma 179). Such children grow up with their minds pulled in different directions by the different cultural values – the ones at home which they are expected to adhere to and the different values that prevail outside and which they are expected to follow as well-assimilated citizens. This leads to a feeling of a loss of identity, of not belonging and insecurity. Hence, their psyches and sensibilities are divided between two worlds, and at best, they emerge with a “hyphenated identity” (179).

### **A Short History of the Parsis**

The Zoroastrian Persian Empire broke down under the impact of Arab invasion during 638 AD and 641 AD. Islam replaced the previous Zoroastrian religion though the language and culture were appropriated by the invaders. Those who did not succumb to the foreign pressure and dispensation fought for their rights. They met with defeat and had to flee from Madyan (in their country Iran) to make their homes in other countries. Because of its geographical proximity, India provided a haven of security for these refugees who carried urns containing their sacred fire. They reached Diu in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD and stayed here for 19 years. Then they sailed towards Gujarat and landed at the port of Sanjan. The local ruler of Sanjan, Jadav Rana, allowed them to stay there on condition of not using their language or particular way of dressing. They were called Parsis because the language they spoke was “Farsi”. This threat to their identity brought the community close and insulated them from the influence of Indian culture. When the Mughals assumed power, they introduced the Persian language. This provided the Parsis with some solace and comfort in having their language restored to them.

When the British colonized India, the Parsis aligned themselves with this Western power and influence. They believed that this identification would make them accepted as part of the Western ruling group. This was probably a response to their frustration at being considered and treated as outsiders by both Hindu and Muslim regimes. However, this was not true of all Parsis. Evidently stalwart nationalists such as Dadabhai Nauroji, Dinshaw Wacha and Ferozeshah Mehta proved to be contrary. An ambivalent attitude is part of the Parsi character that has already gone through the process of emigration and subsequent exposure to the various cultural influences in India. This has imparted a heterogeneous quality to Parsi existence in India and has bound them in an “ambience of nationalism” (Gera 147). The Parsis are intimately connected with the history of Bombay. The [cotton boom](#) was largely successful because of Parsi entrepreneurs. The oldest newspaper in Bombay, "Bombay Samachar", was run by Parsis. One of India's biggest industrial houses was founded by a Parsi, [Jamshedji Tata](#). Many of Bombay's causeways, roads and buildings were built by members of the [Jeejeebhoy](#) and [Ready money](#) families.

### **A Brief Introduction to Rohinton Mistry:**

- Born on July 3, 1952 in Bombay, India, to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry (parents)
- Attended school at Villa Theresa Primary School and at St. Xavier High School
- Received his Bachelor's degree in Science at St. Xavier's College, University of Bombay, in 1974
- Married Freny Elavia after graduation
- Immigrated to Canada at the age of 23 in 1975
- Completed a second B.A. in English and Philosophy at University of Toronto in 1982
- His first short story won the Hart House Prize at the University of Toronto in 1983
- Won the same award in 1984 for another short story
- In 1985 he received Annual Contributors' Prize from the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*
- First book of 11 inter-related short stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* published by Penguin Canada in 1987; this collection has since been published in USA and Great Britain as *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from the Firozsha Baag*
- Publication of first novel, *Such a Long Journey* in 1991
- The second novel, *A Fine Balance* was published in 1995
- His third novel, *Family Matters* was published in 2002
- His latest work, *Scream* was published in 2008

A Parsi Gujarati writer of Indian origin, Rohinton Mistry migrated to the West (Canada) in 1975 at the age of 23. He worked as a clerk at the Imperial Bank of Commerce in Canada after moving there with his wife. "Mindless, clerical work," says Mistry about his stint at the bank. To overcome this dreariness, he joined the University of Toronto to study English and Philosophy part-time. His first short story "One Sunday" won the Hart House literary award. The following year he won it again for another short story "Auspicious Occasion". In 1987, his short stories were collected and published by Penguin Canada as an anthology titled *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. It was his first novel, *Such a Long Journey*, in 1991 that established him as a writer of repute. It won many awards: Canada's Governor General's Award for fiction; the Commonwealth Writer's Award for the Best Book of the Year; and the WH Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award. It was also nominated for the UK-based Booker Prize (now known as the Man Booker) and the Trillium Award.

However, his writings return to India time and again for themes and subject matter. As a writer in a new country and in a different social and cultural milieu, he faces many challenges. He has to make sense of the various spaces he occupies as a Parsi, Indian and Canadian. In doing so, several questions arise – about where he belongs; what is his identity and ethnicity; what does it mean to belong to a nation and how to deal with multiculturalism within a framework of a nation state? In an interview with Nermeen Shaikh of *AsiaSource* in 2002, Mistry states:

I felt very comfortable with the books and music [of the West] but actually *living* in the West made the same music seem much less relevant. It suddenly brought home to me very clearly the fact that I was imitating something that was not mine, that made no sense in terms of my own life, my own reality.

[http://www.asiasource.org/news/special\\_reports/mistry.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/mistry.cfm)

He grew up in a Parsi household in Bombay (now Mumbai) and this is what he knows best:

When you have grown up in one place and spent the first 23 years of your life there - that's how old I was when I left - it is almost as though you are never going to be removed from that place. Twenty-three years in the place where you were born, where you spent all your days with great satisfaction and fulfillment - that place never leaves you. All you have to do is keep updating it a little bit at a time. And it works. (ibid)

### **His Works**

As mentioned earlier, Rohinton Mistry's short stories collection (*Tales from Firozsha Baag*) is his first published work which together describes the daily life of the Parsi residents in a Bombay apartment block. The stories concern themselves with the ordeals, sufferings and the particular characteristics and mannerisms of Bombay Parsis. Mistry explores the relationships existing within this community, their cultural identity and the uniqueness of their community living. At the same time, he attempts to understand and indeed, fully embrace the hybrid/syncretic nature of the diasporic Parsi experience whether that is in North America, Canada or in India. Some of the stories deal with the journeys undertaken by some Parsi residents of Firozsha Baag. Notwithstanding the daring and courage of some of these residents in leaving their homeland for N. America and subsequently resettling in the West, it is interesting to note that they are also assailed by a feeling of guilt. It must be mentioned that this [diaspora](#), contrary to the Iranian diaspora, has been fulfilled in a positive way by the Parsis despite the lingering sense of guilt.

However, it was with his first novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991) that Mistry burst upon the literary scene as a writer who showed great promise. This novel won many prizes and established him as a writer of repute. We shall discuss this novel in more detail in the following pages. His second novel, *A Fine Balance* was published in 1995 which won several awards including the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the prestigious Giller Prize, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Fiction, and The Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Award. It was also short listed for the Booker Prize (like his first novel), the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and the Irish Times International Fiction Prize. This novel is again set in India, during the mid seventies when Indira Gandhi had declared a state of internal emergency without consulting her cabinet. The story revolves around the lives of four protagonists who are different from each other and have to live together in the same humble city apartment: Dinabhai, a widow who refuses to remarry and fights to earn a meagre living as a seamstress; two tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash, uncle and nephew, who have come to the city in the hope of finding work; and a student, Maneck Kohlah, from a village situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. Maneck's father has sent his son to a city school. As with his first novel, the author mixes historical facts with the characters' private lives. The common perceptions regarding the regime of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi provide knowledge of the political corruption and its effect on the common citizen. The "Fine Balance" of the novel's title refers to an ideal state or middle path of being between sympathy and gullibility, kindness and weakness.

Mistry's third novel, *Family Matters*, was as well received internationally as its predecessors, nominated once again for the Man Booker and won the Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize. In the same interview mentioned above, he states that

*Family Matters* I think has an internal canvas which is as complex as the external canvas of *A Fine Balance*; that is the only similarity I can perhaps point out. But there are concerns, primarily political ones, which both the books share. If you write about Bombay in the mid-90s, especially if you give your characters a political consciousness,

it is inevitable that they will sit and talk about what is happening in the city, what is appearing in the newspapers.

This novel depicts contemporary Bombay and is set in the 1990s. At the centre of the book is an old man, a Parsi, Nariman Vakeel with Parkinson's disease. He is a retired academic (a professor of English) whose illness strains family relationships. He even compares himself to King Lear at one point. His memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the city's, and the nation's history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family. The private and public histories intersect in this novel too.

Mistry's latest book, *The Scream* (2008), has been illustrated by the famous Canadian artist Tony Urquhart. It is 48 pages long and printed originally in a limited edition of 150 copies that was sold exclusively by World Literacy of Canada to raise funds for their organization. The story is located in a Bombay apartment and narrated by a man at the end of his life, who is angry at the predicament of old age, at his isolation from his family and from a world that no longer understands him. He rants and raves at the unfairness of his situation in a way reminiscent of old Mr. Pastakia in *Such a Long Journey*. His complaints have both humor and pathos. His soliloquies are about ageing which is a universal phenomenon. When a man becomes old and ceases to be a breadwinner, he becomes less influential and important and more dependent upon others. The protagonist of *The Scream* is such a man who is neglected and misunderstood by his family and society.

## **Main Themes**

### **A critique of the new nation state, of the government's principle of unity in diversity and high morale:**

The novel catches the spirit of the diaspora in the feeling of rootlessness, helplessness and alienation felt by the Parsi community at Khodadad Building in general and Gustad Noble in particular. The Parsis had to undergo economic losses, lowered social status and personal suffering when the government decided to nationalize banks. Though this move was welcomed by the rest of the nation, the Parsi community became mere employees instead of masters in the banking sector. Nationalization symbolized nationhood, but it was a death blow to the Parsi way of life. Dinshawji comments:

Parsis were the Kings of banking in those days. Such a respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the bank. (38)

The new nation state formed after independence is celebrated. However, the story of Major Bilimoria, Ghulam Mohammed, the war with Pakistan over what is now Bangladesh is pitted against the media hype of nationalism and patriotism over the war, the equating of Mother India with Mother Indira and the corruption existing in high places. The suppressed histories of ordinary people, some of whom (like Major Bilimoria and Ghulam Mohammed), are used by the state for its own vested interest serve to unseat the major history of a unified nation state. The question that Mistry seems to be asking is 'Is this a new kind of colonialism?'

### **The notion of an ideal community**

In this context, Bombay appears to embody the space that favors a '**unified heterogeneity**'. However, it is a mix of different communities wherein the smaller counter histories of individuals and ethnic groups interrupt and challenge the concept of a unified community living amicably. The Shiv Sena's insistence on ethnic parochialism makes nonsense of the pretty picture of tolerant and unified heterogeneity in a city or state, leave alone a nation. Gustad Noble's comment is relevant even today:

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. (55)

Maybe Mistry wanted to define an ideal space in the city of cosmopolitan Bombay. But the rendering of this idea acquires a life of its own and reveals intolerant groups of people who have problems in sharing space. On the other hand, the novel also shows the city as a place which holds oppositional spaces like the Parsi community and its Tower of Silence as well as the church of Mount Mary where Malcolm takes Gustad. There are other spaces where people belonging to different communities meet without clashing and in a friendly ambience. These spaces are Peerbhoy Paanwalla's shop, Gustad's office, the House of Cages, Flora fountain, Crawford market etc. At the end of the novel people of all communities come together in a morcha or show of protest against the Municipality. This notion of a heterogeneous community can be seen as an ideal one in the face of a '**unified nation state**' concept forced upon the people by the government.

### **A critique of power and politics**

The story of Major Bilimoria who is manipulated as a pawn by the Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi, in her money scandals, depicts the corruption existing in the highest political circles. She misuses her power and position to divert money from training Bangladeshi freedom fighters to the car business of her son. Her use of Jimmy Bilimoria as a scapegoat exposes the hollowness of the governmental system and the callous disregard for the country's citizens who are fed on the empty rhetoric of national fervor and patriotism. The common people see the pettiness of their leaders and their corrupt politics in which they (the citizens) are dispensable pawns. Indira Gandhi becomes Mother India.

There was report after report of the citizenry's generous support for the fighting men: about an eighty-year old peasant who travelled to New Delhi, clutching her two gold wedding bangles, which she presented to Mother India for the war effort (some newspapers reported it as Mother Indira, which really did not matter – the line between the two was fast being blurred by the Prime Minister's far-sighted propagandists who saw its value for future election campaigns). (297-298)

The irony is that Mrs. Gandhi as mother of India's masses had grown oppressively authoritarian and lost sight of the principle of welfare state meant for her children, that is, the citizens.

## **Journey**

Refer to the critical explanation on the epigraphs and the central motif of journey given under 'Literary Significance of the Work'.

## **History**

History is the theme which permits Mistry to journey back and forth in time; re-collect, re-capture and re-enact memories; exorcize them partially and at the same time interrogate them. These memories recreate history and identity – a history that is predicated on the premise and ideology of a 'unity in diversity' nation state. The author's construction or re-construction of this kind of history and its subversive critique, invites a dismantling of such power hierarchies in political and social spheres. In this way, he can expose the officially given history.

## **Relationships**

Mistry seeks to explore in his stories and novels, the relationships forged between family members, friends and others. These relationships form the heart and emotional core of any community, as well as highlight the cultural identity and the uniqueness of community living.

## **Superstition and logic / knowledge**

The narrative of superstition is brought into the novel through the subplot of the neighbour, Ms Kutpitia and Dilnavaz, the gentle wife of Gustad Noble. At first Dilnavaz is skeptical of Ms Kutpitia's claim about the correctness of the lizard tail omen (that a wriggling lizard tail is a bad omen). But the failed dinner party and later on the illness of Roshan and the rebellious attitude of Sohrab strengthen her belief in superstition. This narrative is poised against the logic of reasoning which is portrayed in Gustad to some extent.

## **Literary Significance of the Work**

As a postcolonial text, the novel attempts many things. It is a celebration of Indian English which is used not for the sake of achieving or introducing a comic effect, but to convey the present status of this form of English (Indian English of the Parsi variety) with its own characteristic features as one of the global "englishes". This kind of use and appropriation of English also functions subversively as a mode of resistance to colonial discourse. The Master Tongue (i.e. English) of the Western academy has been hybridized and interspersed with native words. In fact, Mistry shouts his subversive intent by not providing a glossary of native words / phrases for the Western reader. At another level, the appropriation or taking over of English also means repossessing our own histories which have been filtered through the prism of either colonial or even postcolonial perspectives.

A significant aspect of this text is the metaphor of **journey**. In fact, journey is a central and most favored motif in diasporic writing. The title *Such a Long Journey* proclaims this motif and is re-inforced by the three epigraphs that preface the novel. The first is from Firdausi's *Shah-Nama*, which hints at the glorious past of the Iranian empire and the present downgraded state of Parsis. The second epigraph is from T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Journey of the Magi", which recalls the belief that the three magi or wise men who traveled far to witness the birth of Christ were Zoroastrian priests. It also gives a sense of a journey that has not ended. A sense of dejection is also implied in the title which is offset by the promise of the end of this long journey and the



hoped-for new order. The third epigraph which is taken from Tagore's *Gitanjali* suggests how some Parsis have moved away to new lands and have had to adapt themselves to new realities. This is the story of the Parsi diaspora. However, this epigraph is more hopeful and looks towards a new order:

And when old words die out on the tongue, new  
melodies break forth from the heart.

And Mistry is doing exactly this. He has appropriated the English language, used the Western realistic mode of narration and mixed it with eastern words/phrases and the native forms of narration including the oral mode, to create a new form of writing.

The novel can also be read as a bildungsroman or a novel of formation. The experiences of Gustad contribute to the process of his growth and maturity. He moves from a position of unyielding hardness to being a soft humane person. He can now accept his son's decision, forgive his friend and understand the important fact of life – that it is a long journey which requires patience and maturity.

### **Comprehensive Summary**

Set in Bombay in 1971, this novel portrays the different aspects of Parsi life among the inhabitants of Khodadad Building (situated north of Bombay) in general and Gustad Noble in particular. The protagonist is an ordinary middle-class person who works as a clerk in a Parsi dominated bank. He is a devoted family man who gradually sees his modest life unraveling. He dreams of sending his eldest son, Sohrab, who excels in school, to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) so that his son can have a career more lucrative and prestigious than his own. The reader comes to know about Gustad's early prosperous life through his nostalgic memories of a well-to-do father who was, later on, financially destroyed by his own brother. Sohrab, an artist at heart, rejects the plan that his father has charted for him. This leads to an estrangement between father and son and the latter leaves home. Gustad's second son, Darius, seems to satisfy the aspirations of his father. His beloved young daughter, Roshan, falls ill for which there appears to be no remedy. He is the one who speaks reasonably amidst the ongoing dramas of his neighbors.

Gustad's war hero and best friend, Major Jimmy "Bili Boy" Bilimoria, has vanished from the apartment complex without any information. One day, he (Gustad) receives a letter from the same old friend, asking him to help in what seems like a heroic mission. He follows his friend's instructions and receives a very large amount of cash. He is then forced into depositing it gradually into a false bank account. Thereafter he is compelled to withdraw it and it is clear that he is dealing with corruption and intrigue. He is forced to involve another friend, the cancer-riddled, happy-go-lucky and lecherous Dinshawji in order to fulfill Jimmy's request. Jimmy Bilimoria reveals the sordid political story behind the money transactions, during a heartbreaking visit Gustad makes to the prison hospital where his friend is kept. Ghulam Mohammed is the trusted and shadowy intermediary between Jimmy and Gustad who makes it clear that Major Bilimoria's death in prison was, in fact, a political murder.

Gustad's secular credentials are presented to the reader in the incident of the wall enclosing Khodadad Building. This wall is a source of great misery for the residents. It is used as



a place for urinating and defecating which gives an unbearable stench and mosquitoes. However, Gustad hits upon a novel plan. He invites a pavement artist to paint the wall. This becomes a highly successful enterprise as the artist paints gods of different religions and creates a space that reflects the secular values of tolerance and friendly co-existence.

The novel's climax comes when the citizens of the dirty and depressed neighborhood, march to the municipal office to demand essential services. On the way, they pause to offer prayers at the transformed wall. But the municipality has already decided to demolish it in order to widen the road. In a violent street fight, Tehmul, the tragic cripple dies while trying to catch a flying brick. The sacred wall is finally destroyed. But the positive aspect is that the limiting, bleak past of Gustad is also destroyed. He had been hit hard by his straitened economic circumstances, his estrangement from his son and his participation in the sordidness of political corruption, and the deaths of two of his dear friends – Jimmy and Dinshawji. His lifetime of frustrations and anger melts away as he prays over the victim, Tehmul Langraa's body following the ugly violence in the streets. The exit of Tehmul whom Gustad regarded as a son, ushers in the reunion of the father with another son - this time his own - Sohrab.

### **Critical Analysis**

As a Parsi and a writer, Mistry is caught in a double bind – as a Parsi he is positioned on the margins of society and as an immigrant to Canada. This “in-betweenness” helps him to write about the complexities of everyday living of such a community and depict their insecurities. He is, therefore, the quintessential outsider. In India, his Parsi origins make him an outsider to the dominant majority community. Living in Canada, he is an outsider to India as well as to his adopted country. In this way, he is eminently suited to speak from a marginalized position, a place or space which privileges him with a “triple” vision. His is a “diasporic” imagination and his work is guided by his experience of ‘double’ displacement and ‘triple’ vision. The novel portrays Indian culture and family life against the backdrop of the country's volatile postcolonial politics. The action takes place in 1971 in Bombay at the moment when war breaks out between India and Pakistan, over what is to become Bangladesh. The extent of the intrusion and effect of public and political events in the lives of ordinary individuals is convincingly portrayed through the troubled life of Gustad Noble and his family. The story expertly shows to which degree political and personal realities are intertwined and how much the microcosm (reflected through the family) echoes the macrocosm (the nation), since the lives of the characters are deeply affected by local corruption and the government's inadequacy. The unstable state of affairs – be it politics, relationships, or the boundaries of a country – is reflected in the constant breaking down of walls of different kinds. The wall enclosing Khodadad Building is demolished, the political boundaries of Pakistan are redrawn as had been done in the Indo-China war, the definition of nationalism is written afresh and the mental walls that Gustad erected in his mind are also brought down like the black people covering the windows. In this way, the novel is a mixture of the characters' private lives with public history.

Thus *Such a Long Journey* educates the reader on the political conditions at a certain point in India's history. The revealing descriptions and deft character sketches of everyday Indian life found in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are present in this novel. Mistry mixes historical facts with common perceptions of the days of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, giving the reader knowledge of the political corruption and its effect on the common citizen.

Mistry's fiction is rooted in the streets of Bombay, the city he left behind for Canada at the age of twenty-three. This is the writer's 'imaginary homeland' (as Salman Rushdie calls it) and Mistry has been compared with the latter, another Bombay born author now based abroad. However there are differences as well as similarities between the two. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* are set in Bombay during the administration of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of India. While Rushdie's novel speaks of the Muslim middle classes, Mistry is comfortable and on sure ground among the Parsi community of Bombay. Rushdie's magic realism is replaced with Mistry's realism. Beyond such differences however, both novels have a tendency to collapse the distinctions between public and private worlds. Both share a sharp wit. Both writers have tasted success and garnered critical respect.

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## SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

Rohinton Mistry's

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### Part II

#### Major Themes

##### **A critique of the theory of a united and secular nation state, of the government's principle of unity in diversity and high morale:**

What the State preaches does not translate into constructive activity. On the one hand, the State wants all Indians to unite under the umbrella of a single national identity. On the other hand, the State uses the same citizens as dispensable pawns in its corrupt games of self-serving interests. In this novel, Mistry has not hidden names behind facades but clearly named the culprits behind a selfish government. The criticism is severe and the indictment harsh. The State advocates an undifferentiated unity which is belied by the parochial or regional politics of groups like the Shiv Sena. But what is to be done with the multicultural diversity of the Indian nation state? Are they to be subsumed under the majority group identity or will they (minority groups) be allowed to retain their cultural, social identities and practices? The author asks these questions as these minority communities are in danger of losing the identity and existence.

##### **A critique of power and politics**

The mass of common people who are poor, disabled, middle class and ordinary are marginalized in the political process. Their homes are in danger of being pulled down and their artistic efforts can be ruthlessly demolished any time the central authority wishes to broaden roads. The seemingly foolish loyalties of ordinary people towards their families and friends mock the cold rationality of self interest and ugly politics. It is even more ironical that these common people are the ones who believe in patriotism and nationalism.

**Politics** interferes and intrudes into the life of common people. It plays havoc and even kills them like Major Bilimoria. The quality of life has suffered since achieving independence – milk is no longer creamy and frothy but watery. When the common people organize a *morcha* to protest against bad civic amenities, the march turns violent and Tehmul is killed. The disabled boy is innocent of what is happening around him and of the politics of social intercourse. He is a citizen yet not an accepted member of society. Like Major Bilimoria, he is an unfortunate victim of political manipulations.

##### **The notion of an ideal community**

The real and different aspects of the unified picture that the center proposes for the state are projected in the city of Bombay. There is the closed Parsi community on one side; another facet reveals the open community gatherings in public places; yet another aspect is the aggressive Shiv Sena whose politics of singular ethnicity and presence rupture the façade of

unity and bonhomie. Mistry reveals, Janus-like, the different notions of community through the chief protagonist Gustad Noble, who is caught in the maelstrom of opposing social and communal differences. The novel critiques as well as proposes an alternative that celebrates, tolerates and allows differences to exist in harmony and yet remain bound by the threads of nationalism. This glimpse of an “unoppressive ethos” (qtd in Roy 139) or “unassimilated otherness” (140) can be seen in the figure of the footpath artist who does not have a family or home, yet he can make any part of Bombay his home. His paintings of different religious icons and figures suggest a model of a community which is cohesive and thrives in allowing differences to live side by side. It suggests a social ethos which is unoppressed and unoppressive in nature. This theory of community is realized by Mistry in the textual space of the novel through the figure of Gustad also, who moves with ease in the world of Malcolm and the church of Mount Mary as well as among the residents of Khodadad Building. It is a matter of importance to the author that community should be re-thought as a matter of expressing “openness to unassimilated otherness” (135).

## **Journey**

The central motif of journey sets the tone of the novel right from the beginning in the use of three epigraphs. (Refer to critical notes on the epigraphs and the metaphor of journey given in Part – I of the lesson on the novel under the heading ‘Literary Significance of the Work’). It is a recurrent theme in immigrant diasporic writing. All historical journeys of Parsis become the central motif of travel. It means a state of moving from one locale, condition or experience to another. There are some literal journeys in the novel. There is the journey uphill to attend Dinshawji’s funeral and the journey undertaken by Gustad to visit Bilimoria in Delhi. There are other small journeys like his visits to Crawford Market with Malcolm Saldanha as also to the church of Mount Mary, the bus ride which ended in an accident and gave Gustad a permanent limp, his visit to Chor Bazar for the sake of his friend, Jimmy’s secret journey to RAW and his subsequent deteriorating condition. There is also the mental journey of the protagonist from darkness (black paper on windows, estrangement with his son and with his friend, Bilimoria) to light (tearing down the black paper, the house being full of light and forgiving his friend and embracing his son). He also makes frequent trips into the past to sustain the present. This is an inward journey by Gustad and he comes to a final realization that life is a rather long journey which has to be covered with patience and love: “So much gravel to tread, so many walks to take” (254). Hence the end of the book is the beginning of awareness in the protagonist. Thus, the metaphor of journey celebrates the “inclusiveness of life and the indestructibility of the human spirit” (Kapadia 176).

## **Superstition and Logic:**

The rituals or *jaadu mantar* practiced by the two women (Ms Kutpitia and Dilnavaz) are supposed to heal and provide remedies for the unfortunate happenings in Gustad’s household. The estrangement between Sohrab and his father and Roshan’s illness are enough to shake the skepticism of gentle Dilnavaz. Modern science demands that medicines be used for curing ailments of the body and mind. But the lingering illness of Roshan upsets the logical reasoning of even Gustad. His trip to St. Mary’s church with his friend Malcolm indicates his shaken belief in scientific medicines. It is ironic that Tehmul dies at the end and Sohrab is reunited with his father as had been hoped for by the two women. Whatever the reason, Roshan also becomes better and the author leaves it to the reader to gauge whether it was the rituals of Ms Kutpitia or

Gustad's trip to the church or the medicines of Dr. Paymaster that healed the little girl and reconciled a son with his father.

This theme is linked to and foregrounds the theme of tradition versus modernity. In the name of tradition, the Shiv Sena practices regional, ethnic politics of exclusiveness and terrorize people of other communities. Roads and places are re-named with traditional ones in order to project the Indian identity. Both instances of asserting one's tradition can be witnessed even today. On the other hand the sacred wall, at which people pray, is demolished in the name of modernity. Earlier, the same wall was a place for relieving oneself.

## History

The history of post-independent India is based on a notion of an imagined community of a nation-state having a national identity. This is then perpetuated as a myth by the hegemonic political dynasty of the Nehru family. Mistry is severe in his criticism of such a history which is determined by a privileged few. The author is in an 'in-between' position with regard to the Parsi community and the Indian nation. This 'outsider status and perspective' helps him to write about the complexities and struggles of everyday living of such a community as well as portray their insecurities when they are caught in the whirlpool of the country's political conflicts with its neighbors and in the quagmire of corrupt domestic politics. The smaller counter histories of ordinary individuals remain suppressed or unacknowledged by the authorities in power because they threaten to destabilize the concept of national identity. Mistry is giving us his version of the real history of the common man and exposing the officially given history.

Through Gustad's mind and memories of past and present, the novel is able to recreate history. This allows the author to question the validity of a history that the State wishes to present or project for the purpose of posterity; a history that is recreated by the majority group or the dominant class or caste; a history that refuses to recognize the presence of minority groups, backward castes and classes, the disabled and women.

History functions like a character whose interference affects the lives of common people. It leads them into dangerous games of espionage and corruption. It also reveals the unpleasant face of a self-seeking government which has no qualms about using the common people as pawns in order to further its own interests, a government which can make a mockery of democracy and trample on it if the occasion demands it. The unstable state of affairs in the life of the country or of its citizens is depicted through the breaking down of walls of different kinds. Physical walls like the one around Khodadad Building are destroyed while new political boundaries are formed between countries. There are mental walls (like the ones in the minds of Indian citizens and of Gustad) which do not allow individuals to move or see beyond a certain limit. They are also brought down like the black paper covering the windows of Gustad's home. In short, history is constantly changing and then recreated and re-written.

In this novel Mistry is also able to criticize the historically constructed depiction of the Parsi stereotype in films (or elsewhere) as a harmless *bawa*, whose desire to cling to his ethnic identity becomes a source of comic humour and amusement. The novel reveals those identity determiners which make up the Parsi individual and it does so with compassion and empathy. Being a Parsi himself, the writer's view is of an insider and a reply to this stereotypical portrayal. Apart from questioning the place and space allocated to ethnic minorities in a unifying nation state, he also critiques the drive to assert religious, caste or language exclusivity. On the one

hand, there is the equalizing force of globalization and on the other, the desire to return to ethnic identity is also present. Mistry questions all this in the role played by the different forces in the body politic and how they threaten to disrupt the fabric of 'unity in diversity' nation state. The novel also calls forth a plea to allow the middle class Parsi protagonist such as Gustad Noble, to live in peace. History is witness to the fact that living itself is a struggle for a middle-class person. At another level, it is an effort to critique the dominant class, caste and majority which usurps and arrogates the power to speak and decide for others. This will, obviously, preclude any recognition of subaltern, minority groups, backward castes and classes, and women. The direction of history is determined by those in power and the novel protests against this fact.

## **Nostalgia**

This is a characteristic of diasporic writing. Gustad Noble constantly relives the past when his father was prosperous and economically well-established. He lives insulated in a space of memory and tries to re-live and re-enact his past by bringing home a live chicken for Roshan's birthday. Each time he is afflicted by an adversity, he goes back to his past to escape the grim moment of the present. According to Mistry, this return to the past also enables one to understand her/his past:

Some people might say it's arrogant of me not to live there [Bombay] and assume that I know everything ... but I'm confident that I do know. It's memory. Well I suppose that when one says memory, its memory plus imagination, which creates a new memory. (qtd. in Roy 151)

He has a perspective that is at once subjective and objective. The metaphor of a journey combines both aspects to culminate in a novel that tries to grapple with the conflict between the individual and nation, between individual and individual, and between an immigrant's memory of a home left long ago and his imagination along with present distance from the past.

## **Relationships**

Mistry seeks to shed light and indeed fully embrace the syncretic nature of the diasporic Parsi experience whether that is in Canada, North America or India. The novel explores different kinds of relationships – with the self, family, community, place and identity. Relationships such as those between father and son, between spouses, between friends (Major Bilimoria, Dinshawji, Malcolm), between neighbors (Ms Kutpitia, Mr. Rabadi etc.), between the individual and State, between the able bodied and socially unacceptable and disabled people like the women in the House of Cages and Tehmul Langraa respectively, are portrayed in the world of *Such a Long Journey*. The struggle of middle class living which is beset with anxieties of all kinds – financial, moral, social, political etc. – is keenly portrayed through the lives of the Parsi characters that people the book.

Gustad is forced to live in a small flat and work as a bank clerk because of his father's financial bungling and the government's decision to nationalize all banks. His life is surrounded by annoyances and irritations that are a part of middle class existence. His neighbours such as Miss Kutpitia has to be kept in good humour in spite of her being superstitious and fractious, because she is the only one who owns a phone. Then there is the "dogwalla idiot" Mr. Rabadi with whom Gustad has a "quarrels and retaliations" (78) relationship. Mrs. Pastakia is tolerated by Gustad because of her husband and old father-in-law Cavasji who regularly shouts at God for

His unfairness. Gustad's friends include his neighbor, Major Jimmy Bilimoria, whom he loves and respects as a brother, his happy-go-lucky colleague Dinshawji whom he admires for his (Dinshawji's) courage in remaining cheerful in spite of suffering from cancer and his helpful college friend Malcolm Saldanha who has helped and advised him in times of need.

Gustad is overjoyed when his son is offered admission at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). However, his "vicarious search for liberation from his lower-class status and closing horizons ends abruptly when his eldest son, Sohrab, relinquishes the opportunity to study engineering at a prestigious technology institute in favor of an ordinary B.A." (Singh 214). Instead of trying to talk and work things out, he prefers to estrange himself completely from his son. This father-son relationship is also played out indirectly between Gustad and Tehmul. It is directly revealed in the reaction of Gustad when Tehmul dies after being hit by a flying brick in the clash between the protesters and the government workers:

Without a word, Gustad slipped one arm under Tehmul's shoulders and the other under his knees. With a single mighty effort he rose to his feet, cradling the still-warm body. The bandaged head lolled limply over his forearm, and he crooked his elbow to support it properly.

Without a trace of his limp, without a fumble, Gustad walked the length of the compound, past the flats near the gate, past the compound's solitary tree and his own flat, past Inspector Bamji's Landmaster, till he reached the end.(335-336)

Gustad offers prayers for Tehmul's smooth passage into the other world. He is himself released from the mental walls that he had harboured in his mind. Tears, which he had not shed till now, flow unchecked and wash away his frustrations, hard feelings and resentments. He is reconciled with his son Sohrab. He is reconnected with his innate good and gentle self.

The relationships with community, authority, country and identity have already been explained under the themes discussed earlier.

### **Middle-class Life**

The novel deals with the trials, frustrations, anxieties and depressions of middle-class living. The residents of Khodadad Building mostly belong to this class and their strategies for trying to survive in a respectable way are portrayed in this novel. The life of Gustad is a prime example of this. The cramped flat where there is no place to keep his books, the wall enclosing the housing complex which is used as an open air urinal, the thin watery milk they have to buy are all representative of middle-class life. Their concerns are financial, moral, social and political.

### **Undercurrent of a patriarchal order**

Women are not very important in the world that Mistry evokes. Dilnavaz is a devoted, loving wife and mother whose presence is neither important nor necessary. She exists as an extension of Gustad with no participation in decision-making or taking initiative/action. Along with Ms Kutpitia, she is seen as superstitious and easily cowed down. Ms Kutpitia is a strange mixture of the old and new. She lives her life captured to an old memory and is a great believer in superstition. She is like the character of Ms Havisham in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*. But she is the only one in Khodadad Building to possess a modern invention, the



telephone. Mistry does not seek reasons behind the superstitious beliefs of the two ladies. The lonely and unfulfilled life of Ms Kutpitia is neither probed nor explained. Even Dilnavaz, who is shown as quite happily married with three children, is criticized (though mildly) for her belief in illogical superstitions. But there is no sympathy for the never-ending domestic chores that she is constantly engaged in throughout the novel. All sympathy is left for the man of the house, Gustad Noble. In fact, he considers it unmanly to cry because “tears were useless, the weakness of women, and of men who allowed themselves to be broken” (p.101). However, after Tehmul’s death, his tears release him from the earlier hard, dry-eyed self. They remove his mental blinkers as well.

## Characters

### Gustad

He is the chief protagonist of the novel. The reader is introduced to him as a “tall and broad-shouldered” Parsi who was the “envy and admiration of friends and relatives whenever health or sickness was being discussed” (1). His story is the reverse of the traditional rags to riches theme, that is, from being poor to becoming wealthy. He belonged to a fairly rich and well to do family. His father had lost his money due to bungling of funds by his brother. Now Gustad works as a lowly bank clerk who lives in a small apartment in Khodadad Building. His *sudra* is torn in places (15) which is a reminder of his straitened circumstances and which tries to laugh off as a bad joke. His inadequacy in buying meat (unlike his father and his friend Malcolm) is compounded by the fact that he has a half empty purse most of the time (18). His rationale for buying beef is twofold – it is cheaper and the cow is a holy animal too. Gustad’s middle class life is signified through different images. The empty aquarium and the black paper on the windows of his house seem to symbolize his unfulfilled middle classes life when “all anxieties intensified, and anger grew – a strange, unfocused anger – and helplessness” (8). He works as a bank clerk and constantly re-lives his past when his grandfather and father had a furniture workshop. The few pieces of furniture that were left to him, “stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of his sanity” (6).

Knowing that his career is neither great nor has a good future, Gustad pins his hopes on his children to secure a better future. That is why he is shocked and simply cannot understand Sohrab’s point of view for not joining IIT. He is an ordinary man who feels betrayed by his friend Jimmy Bilimoria and his son Sohrab, who feels disgusted at the corruption prevailing in the state, and at the wall encircling his apartment block for being used as a urinal. Nevertheless, Gustad has to change and grow before he can accept his son’s decision. He believes that “if tradition is lost, then the loss of respect for those who respected and loved tradition always followed” (61). Whenever a crisis confronts him, he catches hold of the past and its memories and derives encouragement from them. The novel is broken by bits of nostalgia and Gustad’s frequent trips down memory lane. His memories show him as a man subscribing to patriarchal notions of being unmanly. He did not cry at his parents’ death. His stoic silence in times of deep grief is finally broken when he carries Tehmul’s dead body to the boy’s flat. This is his release from some (though not all) pre-conceived notions of patriarchy and tradition. His anger, frustrations, and sorrow are washed away with the tears coursing down his cheeks and it is only fitting that he should be reconciled with his son Sohrab at this time.

However, in spite of being ordinary and common, Gustad is uncommon in retaining his dignity and humanity in the face of betrayal, grief and corruption. He is the only one in

Khodadad Building who regards the disabled Tehmul as a human being and shows him consideration, sympathy and patience.

## **Dinshawji**

He hides his illness and suffering under a clownish exterior. His language is peppered with abuses and double edged talk. His humorous sallies and responses reflect the life affirming energy of the ordinary people of the country. They also oppose the authority of “an amorally efficient nation state which maintains powers at huge human cost” (Roy 60). Dinshawji deliberately crosses the boundaries of decency and decorum with his sexual innuendos and scatological (obscene) jokes. His political analyses debunk authority and reduce its political maneuvers to irreverence and ridiculousness. His comment on America’s unease with India’s friendship with Russia does not merely explain (metaphorically) the state of affairs, it also acts as a protest against the imperialist propaganda of those who have taken upon themselves the power to decide for others:

They don’t like her being friends with Russia, you see. Makes Nixon shit, lying awake in bed and thinking about it. His house is white, but his pajamas become brown every night. (145)

Mistry makes Dinshawji memorable for his jokes and incisive political commentaries. He also makes him human with his weaknesses and follies. Though Dinshawji is against fascist trends of right wing politics in Bombay, he is not averse to making fun of people belonging to other regions like Madrasis, Gujaratis etc. He goes too far with Laurie, the new typist in the bank. In fact, Gustad has to reprimand him to stop his tomfoolery. Once the mask of clowning is taken away, Dinshawji looks his real self: a very sick man who had been battling cancer with humour. In place of the clownish man, there is “a grave individual, suddenly fragile and spent, who greeted them [colleagues] with only a quiet hallo... Dinshawji was no longer playing a role; reality at last has caught up with him” (180-181). He tells Gustad that it is “more difficult to be a jovial person all the time than to be a quiet sickly one” (180). For all his foibles, Dinshawji is good friend and Gustad cannot thank find him enough for his help in transferring the money sent by Major Bilimoria. He is a sociable person who is equally at ease with Gustad’s daughter, Roshan, and with his colleagues in the bank. Dinshawji’s behaviour, hospitalization, death, and funeral force Gustad to contemplate anew the mysteries of life.

## **Tehmul Lungraa**

He is an inmate of Khodadad Building but lives on its fringes as he has never been accepted as an equal by the other residents. Since his fall from the neem tree, he was never the same again. He has “nothing to look forward to but a life of pain” (30). He had “a child’s mind and a man’s urges” (303). He was comfortable in the presence of children but the grown-ups lost patience with his annoying habits. The uncomfortable clash between the desires of his mind and his body makes him steal Roshan’s doll as well as visit the House of Cages. He is a social outcast and almost like the rats that people do not want to have in their homes. Even the prostitutes will not have him as a customer (though these women were themselves not a part of acceptable social interaction). He is thus doubly marginalized – as a disabled person and as a Parsi too. The case of Tehmul is tragic and a sad reminder to the able-bodied people to treat the disabled with care and

consideration. The state has not done anything for such people who are left to lead tragic unfulfilled lives.

His relationship with Gustad is strange yet loving. He adores the latter and is ready to do anything for him. On the other hand, Gustad is the only inmate of Khodadad Building who is patient and kind in his dealings with the disabled boy. He almost looks upon Tehmul as a son. When a flying brick kills the boy, Gustad picks up the dead body and even supports the head properly so that it does not roll about limply. He carries the body to the boy's flat and performs the Parsi ritual of prayer after death.

### **Major Jimmy Bilimoria**

He is mostly absent in the novel, but is an omnipresent reminder of the myth of national unity which is more destructive than constructive. As a loyal citizen, he leaves his community to join RAW (at Delhi) which practically functions as a spying agency to monitor the subversive actions of Indira Gandhi's detractors. He is a victim of nationalistic fervor as he trusts the Prime Minister and follows her orders blindly. But the reward for patriotism is betrayal and death. He is briefly rejoined with his community when Gustad visits him in the hospital. The story of Major Bilimoria has been reworked from the original Nagarwala case. According to newspaper reports in 1971, the Head Cashier of State Bank of India (Delhi) was called by someone who gave his name as Mrs. Gandhi and told him to give 6 million rupees to Mr. Nagarwala. The cashier followed the instructions and handed the money to Mr. Nagarwala. Later, he went to the police as he was beset with doubts. Upon investigation, Mrs. Gandhi claimed that she had not made any call. The cashier was suspended and Mr. Nagarwala arrested. The latter confessed later that he had mimicked her voice and taken the money. He died under suspicious circumstances (as had Major Bilimoria).

Major Bilimoria's life is an example of how an authoritative state uses its citizens as dispensable and exploitable pawns to further its own interests. It also mocks the blind nationalistic patriotism of ordinary citizens. The State behaves as a cold and ruthless machine which is capable of using credulous ordinary people to perform its dirty political and financial intrigues and then casting them away when their utility is over.

### **Peerbhoy Paanwala**

He is a "grizzled old man whose lips were perpetually reddened, doubtless from sampling his own wares" (158). He always wore a '*loongi*' and towered over the different varieties of his *paan* like a benevolent and wise deity. Mistry describes him splendidly as a man with "wrinkled, old-woman dugs" that "hung over a loose-skinned belly equipped with a splendid, ageless navel that watched the street tirelessly, an unblinking, all-seeing third eye [like that of Shiva]". He had *paans* for every possible problem or occasion: for sleeping, for not sleeping, for digesting food, for purifying the kidneys, for even easing the pain of birth or death. His most famous *paan* was the *Palung-tode* (bed-breaker) *paan* which nervous novices ate/imbibed before going into the House of Cages. He is also the go-between Ghulam Mohammed and Gustad.

His shop is an example of a public space where people of different communities, cultures and religions meet and interact in a friendly, non-threatening ambience. There is no sense of being different, of oppression or of oppressing anyone. This space is set up in opposition to the

theory of community as a homogeneous group which had been proposed by the center and reflected by the closed walled-in Parsi community of Khodadad Building

### **Dr. Paymaster**

He is regarded as a physician healer who is “wise and kind, humorous and considerate, who could cure half the sickness just by making the patient laugh it away” (112). With the passage of time, he becomes a grandfatherly person “with the countenance of a sad clown” (113). However, as Mistry tells us, he was not a “spontaneous individual” and his clowning was an act which was “carefully controlled”. The doctor conserved his cheerfulness for his patients who needed it. He is also an example of a physician who does not bother to update his medical knowledge and prescribes the same medicine for the same illness. It also shows the declining quality of life as Dr. Paymaster finds it increasingly difficult to order foreign medical journals which could inform him about the latest findings in medical research.

### **The Artist**

Refer to critical comments on the artist under the heading “Style”.

## **Style**

Mistry writes in a realistic mode which is almost Dickensian in its technique. In fact, Guy Lawson writes that “Mistry and Dickens are interested in those to whom history happens, those with little control over their circumstances” (qtd. in Kapadia & Khan 78). He has also been compared to R.K. Narayan and Salman Rushdie. His close attention to ordinary details captures the illusion of reality. The story of Gustad and the process of his disillusionment and hardships could have resulted in a sentimental, mawkish novel. But Mistry uses ironic humour and “a rare economy of image and symbol” (Singh 215) to write a novel which has “tough-minded realism” as its core. With the help of this technique, Mistry is able to reflect and portray the social ills of different communities and the corruption in high places. He draws upon different culture-specific narrative styles to tell his tale of the Parsi community. His use of the western tradition of realism is intermixed with the eastern oral tradition of story telling in the way Arabian Nights is written. His narration and handling of characters is like the Indian “sutradhaar” (as Nilofer Bharucha terms it) who controls the characters, manipulates the action and leads the spectator/reader through the story.

The flashback technique is another characteristic of Mistry’s style. Through Gustad, the author takes his readers into the past which is marked by nostalgia and the sense of a better quality of life. The past highlights the deteriorating quality of the present. This casts doubts on the future and Gustad is concerned about the kind of Bombay his son will inherit.

The English language (that Mistry uses) is hardly equipped to represent an Asian identity. But Mistry as a ‘double outsider’ has used the language of the colonizer to represent an emerging decolonized people. On one hand, the gap between the English language and Asian experience is too vast to be bridged. On the other hand, English appears to be the only language which is accommodating enough to accept code-mixing and words from the native language, and flexible enough to represent the experience of migrancy and diaspora. For the author, English seems to

be an obvious choice as he can translate his sense of displacement, fluid identity and outsider status in terms of space, language and culture. He can fruitfully use the language that is culturally unfamiliar yet 'fluid' and 'global' insofar as the diasporic experience is concerned. His use of Hindi and Parsi words (polyglot language) mixed with English makes interesting reading.

Mistry's language is evocative and vividly conjures images through the power of words. During Dinshawji's funeral, Gustad tries to cut through the histrionics of the dead man's wife, Alamai which is described as : "He deftly guided his words in through little windows that opened between her sobs" (245). The use of alliteration further enhances his prose. The description of the dust in Delhi is described as "[g]ritty grains crawling busily, exploring the skin with countless little feet and claws, coarsely announcing their chafing, scratching, raging omnipresence" (265). The use of figurative devices like zeugma, metaphor and symbol etc. add color and zest to his writing. An example of zeugma is: "Grinding spices on the masala stone was one thing, grinding events to a halt was another" (282).

The metaphor of the wall is projected through oppositional and multiple ideas. The wall around Khodadad Building provides a measure of protection to the inmates. But for the state, it is a barrier to modernity. So it is demolished in order to broaden the road. On the other hand, the presence of the wall is a source of irritation to the inhabitants of the building because passers-by use it to relieve themselves. This gives rise to an unbearable stench and the growth of countless mosquitoes. When Gustad hits upon the brilliant idea of bringing a pavement artist to paint the wall, it (the wall) acquires a positive significance. The artist is able to convert the wall into a secular yet religious place where deities of different religions converge in amicable harmony: "What an amazing contrast to the wall of old" and "[t]he black wall had verily become a shrine for all races and religions" (286) thinks Gustad. The black paper put up by Gustad on the windows during the previous war symbolize the barriers that he has built in his mind. These walls have to be pulled down to make way for openness, new ideas and changes. The wall then becomes a matter of perspective and attitude. The pavement artist in his various journeys had learned that:

impermanence was the one significant certainty governing his work. Whenever the vicissitudes and vagaries of street life randomly dispossessed him of his crayoned creations, forcing him to repaint or move on, he was able to do so cheerfully. (212)

But after the success of the wall, he begins to think of it as "my wall" (329) and decides to paint in oil and enamel only as he can then achieve permanence in his art. It seems certain that his social aspirations and "complacent routine" will soon come to an end as the work on the wall was "reawakening in him the usual sources of human sorrow: a yearning for permanence, for roots, for something he could call his own, something immutable" (184). The abrupt end of his short journey to glory reminds him that he has a long way to go. The sacred wall has, in this sense, become a motif of unchangeability.

The metaphor of the journey which is a central theme of the work has been discussed in detail under the heading of "Major Themes".

Compassionate, and rich in details of character and place, this unforgettable novel charts the journey of a moral heart in a turbulent world of change: a heart which remains upright and honest in spite of receiving a lot of unaccounted money, which learns to accept and accommodate the decision of his son and the deaths of his friends, which understands the

unfairness of life and yet has the courage to carry out the difficult business of living. Mistry's tale is like Peerbhoy Paanwala's:

It was not tragedy, comedy or history; not a pastoral, tragical-comical, historical-pastoral or tragical-historical. Nor was it epic or mock-heroic. It was not a ballad or an ode, masque or anti-masque, fable or elegy, parody or threnody. Although a careful analysis may have revealed that it possessed a smattering of all these characteristics. (306)

The readers respond to his narrative "in the only way that made sense: with every fiber of their beings".

### Important Questions on the Novel

- 1) Elaborate upon the theme of the journey in the novel, *Such a Long Journey*.
- 2) Comment briefly upon the major themes in the novel.
- 3) Write character studies of the following: Gustad, Dinshawji, the pavement artist.
- 4) Why, do you think, Mistry has called his novel, *Such a Long Journey*?
- 5) Compare and contrast the characters of Gustad Noble and Major Bilimoria, Dilnavaz and Ms Kutpitia.
- 6) Mistry's novel is a satire on the corruption and indifference of the government and local authorities. Discuss.
- 7) Do you consider Major Bilimoria to be a true friend of Gustad Noble? Answer with reference to the novel.
- 8) Discuss the significance of the wall in the novel.
- 9) Elaborate on the role of money in the public and private spheres.
- 10) What is the significance of history and nostalgia in the novel?
- 11) Comment upon the style and mode of narration in *Such a Long Journey*.
- 12) *Such a Long Journey* throws light on the Parsi way of life. Discuss.
- 13) The House of Cages and Tehmul represent that section of society which is considered socially unacceptable and outcast. Do you agree? Why?

### Short Glossary

**Realism:** Literary realism most often refers to a way of writing, which began with certain works of [nineteenth-century French literature](#) and extended up to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century authors in different countries, towards depictions of contemporary life and society "as they were." In the spirit of general "[realism](#)," authors using this mode preferred to depict ordinary everyday activities and experiences, instead of a romanticized or idealized presentation. The realist novel was like life itself - complex in texture and appearance, rich in character, diverse in perspective, and operating on several levels.

**Alliteration:** It is the repetition of initial sounds in neighboring words. **Example:** In the phrase "sweet smell of success", the repetition of the 's' sound consecutively constitutes an alliteration.

**Zeugma:** The use of a word to modify or govern two or more words in such a manner that it applies to each in a different sense. **Example:** "Mr. Gupta took his hat and his leave". In this sentence, the verb "took" is used for two different things.

**Metaphor:** A metaphor is a comparison. A metaphor establishes a relationship between 2 things at once; it leaves more to the imagination. It is a shortcut to the meaning; it sets two unlike things side by side and makes us see the likeness between them.

**Symbol:** It means an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning.  
**Example:** The Cross is a symbol of Christ's Crucifixion and stands for Christianity.

**Bildungsroman:** It is a German term meaning a novel of education or formation. The subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character as he passes from childhood undergoing various experiences – including a spiritual crisis – into maturity.

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