



JOURNEY FROM HAPPINESS TO MISERY AS DEPICTED IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY* : A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Dr. S. Chelliah

(Professor ,Head & Chairperson,School of English & Foreign Languages & School of Indian Languages,Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai - 625 021. (T.N). India.)

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to focus on the most renowned contemporary writer Rohinton Mistry who devotes most of the time to portraying the realistic picture of Indian family life, historical and political culture, economic hardships and emotional alienation etc., by proving that literature is a major weapon for social change. This study revolves round the journey of happiness to misery in *Such a Long Journey*, by giving a vivid picture of Indian family life, culture, characterization and symbolism. Rohinton Mistry, the successful writer had used literature as a mirror to exhibit some aspects of the society in which he lived.

Keywords: *Literature, Society, Parsi community, India.*

Citation:

APA Chelliah,S. (2017) Journey from happiness to misery as depicted in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a long journey* : A brief analysis. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL*, 4(1), 18-21.

MLA Chelliah,S "Journey from happiness to misery as depicted in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a long journey*: A brief analysis." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL* 4.1(2017): 18-21.

© Copyright VEDA Publication

Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of life which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all , while 'history' is considered as the study of the rise and fall of men. There is a psychological bond connecting history with literature. History is as much a revelation of the mind and its characteristics as literature is an expression of the characteristics of society at large. Literature, in

essence, is a mirror of society, its morals, ethics and ideals, inner life , dreams and social mores and innumerable other related things in life and society. Carlyle described literature as "all and for all ages". It is eternal and eternally inspiring; its end is endless though its essence lies in the purification and sanctity of human life" like the soul of man which is immortal and immune from decay: a good and healthy literature lives forever and shall not be in oblivion at all.



Literature thus, is based on society; whatever is seen in literature is the reflection of society. With a slight modification, Matthew Arnold goes to the extent of describing literature as “the criticism of life”. The message of literature is for all ages. That is why the voice of Shakespeare appeals to all even today. A great literature brings larger, closer and fresher relations with life, which helps society to preserve its culture and tradition to make aware of its past and present and even warns about the forthcoming danger. A good literature, no doubt, entertains the society as well as reforms its attitude by bringing about many changes. A writer may use literature as a mirror or as a mould. He may either mirror the society or shape it. All the contemporary writers of the particular period would exhibit some aspects of the society in which they lived. Rohinton Mistry is one such writer who, by giving a realistic picture of Indian family life, historical and political culture, economic hardships and emotional alienation, human relationships and uniqueness of community living, has enlarged and enriched our imaginative experience of life and society at large.

Rohinton Mistry, born in 1952 and growing up in Bombay, of Parsi descent, a small religious community devoted to Zoroastrianism, graduated with a degree in Mathematics and Economics from the University of Bombay. In 1975 at the age of 23 and just one month after a state of Emergency was declared in India, Mistry immigrated to Toronto, Canada where there were more opportunities in business and where he was encouraged to settle and make a life for himself. He soon realized that his job was not good as expected and began attending a four-year part-time course in English and philosophy at the University of Toronto. In 1983, Mistry began to write short stories in his spare time and received a great deal of literary attention. In 1987, he published his collection of eleven short stories namely *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag*, which revolve around the lives of Parsi families in Bombay apartment Block.

Such a Long Journey (1991), the first novel of Rohinton Mistry, gives a vivid picture of Indian family life and culture and tells a story rich in subject matter, characterization and symbolism. Set in 1971 Bombay, when India went on war over what was

later to become Bangladesh, this is the political context for the unfortunate events that disrupt the personal lives of the kindhearted Parisman, Gustad Nobal and his family and friends. Mistry skillfully parallels public events involving Indira Gandhi with the misfortune of the principal characters of the novel.

Rohinton Mistry, an Indian born Canadian author, has taken a political background especially the political regime of Indira Gandhi as a Prime Minister as the setting for his novels. He has explored the Parsi life in Post Independent India and political Scenario of India in his novels. Mistry's great asset as a narrator lies in his ability to guide the readers on a literary journey into the streets of Bombay, the Parsi community and Indian politics, inviting them to discover shared values and one common community. This novel unfolds a long vista of varied interests all along the development of a well-wrought plot, set against the background of the Indo-pak war of 1971 and the period of Emergency.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey's* title is taken from T.S. Eliot's poem *Journey of the Magi* which provides one of the three epigraphs to the novel:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
for a journey and such a Long journey.

The title has a symbolic significance and refers to the life of Gustad Noble, the central character of the story. In T.S.Eliot's poem, the journey is undertaken by three wise men to pay their homage to the divinely baby. The star guided them towards their destination. In the case of Gustad, life itself is a long journey with a lot of undulations'. The guiding star in his life is the deep faith in God and the stoic spirituality with which he approaches life. This novel deals with the protagonist Gustad Noble, an ageing Parsi, “a man swimming in the tide water of his fifth decade of life”(SLT 1). As an ordinary man he had to face many trials in life being a teller in a bank. But he had his own dreams about the future. He also had plans for his eldest son sohrab but one by one, the aspirations crumble down like a pack of cards. Sohrab goes against his will, Darius the second son, falls in love with Rabad's daughter and Roshan, the daughter, keeps ill-health.



Set in Bombay against the backdrop of war in the Indian Subcontinent and the birth of Bangladesh, *Such a Long Journey* tells the story of the peculiar ways in which the conflict impinges on the lives of Gustad Noble. In the opening chapter of the novel, one can see Gustad as a peaceful and orthodox Parsi. He regularly does his Kusti prayers and reads the newspaper:

“The first light of morning barely illuminated the sky as Gustad Noble face eastward to offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda. Thewhile reciting his Kusti prayers” (SLJ 1)

While the novel is depicting the life-style of Parsi in the city against the background of the Indo-Pak war of 1971, Gustad Noble, the central character of the novel, is an individual depicted as a classical hero passing from “happiness to misery”. Employed in a bank, Gustad is a father of three children Sohrab, Darius and a daughter named Roshan. He has a few good and understanding friends like Major Jimmy Bilimoria and Dinshawji, the latter working with him in the bank.

One day Jimmy suddenly left the Khodadad Building, where he lived, without a word even to Gustad which upsets the latter. Gustad says about Jimmy in disgust as “A time friend like this, after being neighbour’ for so many years, is a shameful way of behaving. Bloody bad manner’s” (p 16). He used to consider Jimmy as a loving brother. As the novel progresses, one can find that from happiness, Gustad’s, life sinks to misery. The novelist has detailed various narratives with the central narrative of Gustad. Gustad, already disillusioned with the indifferent behavior of Sohrab is now disturbed by the disappearance of a close friend. Sohrab refuses to get admitted himself in IIT, which was Gustad’s life long dream. He sees a rebellious Sohrab. Her becoming rebellious in attitude is the second cause of misery for Gustad:

“... Congratulation for sohrab. The IIT genius’ Sohrab ignored him and glared at his father. ‘Have you told the whole world about it already?’.....sohrab persisted. ‘you keep boasting to everyone about IITI’am not interested in it” (p 47).

Gustad’s beloved daughter Roshan suffers from diarrhea and to get rid of that, Gustad’s wife Dilnavaz

tries all Kinds of stupid things that Miss Kutpita advises her to do. After some days, Gustad receives a letter from Jimmy. He receives a package consisting of rupees 10 lakhs from Jimmy. The trouble starts when he tries to hide 10 lakh rupees as requested by Jimmy. Gustad asks for the help of Dinshawji for accomplishing this task. But Dinshawji in order to impress Laurie Coutino, a staff in the bank, reveals everything to her. In order to keep the secret Gustad asks Dinshawji not to open his mouth.

...Luckily, Lauie does not believe in your secret service and ten lakh rupees and guerrillas....I will start telling people that poor Dinshawji’s health is not good again, he is feeling completely under the weather” (p 214)

This makes further complication in the life of Gustad ,because this incident leads to the death of Dinshawji and Gustad’s conscience troubles him often. After that, comes the meeting with Major Bilimoria and his confession. Other incidents like the death of Tehmul Lungraa and the demolition of Gustad’s sacred wall by the Municipal authorities make Gustad’s life a miserable one. The main plot of the novel is how Gustad suffers due to his friend major Bilimoria . The very first suffering of Gustad is because of Jimmy’s sudden disappearance which worries Gustad, for he thinks of Jimmy as more than a friend:

“But although Gustad would not admit it, Jimmy Bilimoria had been more than just a neighbor. At the very least, he had been like a loving brother. Almost one of the family, a second father to the children”(p 16)

Though there are other thematic strands in the narrative, the other portraying the mystery that shrouds Jimmy Bilimoria, the fictional counter part of the infamous Sohrab Negarwala, is central to Mistry’s narrative. Sohrab’s rebellion, Roshan’s illness, Tehmul’s tragedy and Dinshawji’s death are other thematic strands carefully strung together to the major thematic strand. The first part of the novel reveals the purpose of writing this novel as to expose Indira Gandhi’s regime and her party. This can be very well seen when Dinshawji and Gustad discuss the nationalization of banks:

“... Parsis were the kings of banking in these days, such respect we used to get .Now the



whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that, Indira nationalized the banks.....”

‘Believe me’ said Dinshawji, she (Indira) is a shrewd woman, these are note-getting tactics. Showing the poor she is on their side.”(p 45)

Mistry has selected sohrab Nagarwala’s case as the main plot of the novel. During 1970’s corruption in high places was more common. Though the enactment of the Nagarwala Case, Mistry makes some important political statements. As it happened, Nagarwala received sixty lakh rupees from a bank manager in Delhi allegedly on the strength of a phone call from the Prime Minister ,which it was said, he imitated . A few months after Nagawala was dead , nobody knew where the money went. The whole event is depicted in this novel, when Major Bilimoria confesses to Gustad. He gives the whole detail of character and about the corruption prevailing in the country;

“ Every one knows there’s corruption” said Gustad.

‘But to this level? Hard to believe’ (p 330)

The reenactment of the Nagarwala case that rocked the nation in the mid-seventies and perhaps of the first time raised a national debate on corruption in high place is powerfully depicted. The leaders involed and the situations remain the same in the novel whereas Major Bilimoria becomes the fictional representative of Sohab Nagarwala. Another idea for choosing to write about this incident is that Sohrab Nagarwala was a Parsi and Rohinton Mistry himself is a Parsi, that is why Mistry has used the very name ‘Sohrab’ to an important character which disturbs Gustad very much. Mistry’s *Such a long Journey* undermines the official version of the Nagarwala case by offering other versions. As Nila Shah says about this novel, “ Bilimoria’s story is fictionalization of a fact, because it is based on the Nagarwala case of the 1980s. In this novel other than Nagarwala’s case, one can see sub-plots like the tragedy of Tehmul, Sohrab’s rebellion, Dinshawji’s death etc. To show the artistic side, Mistry has produced an unforgettable character named Lungra Tehmul. In a word, it may be said that *Such a Long Journey* is a brilliant first novel by one of the most remarkable writers today to have emerged from the Indian literary tradition in many years.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Mistry, Rohinton. *Such a Long Journey* London: Faber and Faber, 1991.
- [2]. Abrahams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th edition Singapore: Harcourt College publishers, 1999
- [3]. Boulton, Marjorie. *The Anatomy of the Novel* Kent: Routledge Keganpaul, 1984
- [4]. Dass, Veena Noble. *Fiction of the Nineties* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994.
- [5]. Dipsinh, Jay and Dodiya. *The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry: Critical Studies* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1998.
- [6]. Dhawan, R.K. ed. *Indian Literature today* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994