

‘A Menace to Family Cocoon’ in Rohinton Mistry’s Novel *Such a Long Journey*

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Abstract— Rohinton Mistry’s first novel, *Such a Long Journey*, creates a vivid picture of Indian family life and culture. Indian middle class family pattern is nuclear. All family members live in cordial relationship. Relationship between parents and children is based mostly on conventional practices. The present novel centers around the family of a Parsi gentleman called Gustad Noble who works as a bank clerk. He was deeply devoted to his work and his family of wife Dilnavaz, two sons Sohrab and Darius and a daughter Roshan. Gustad is living in socially and financially petty circumstances which has left him nostalgic for his grandfather’s days. He cherishes dreams of regaining his family’s lost prosperity through his eldest son Sohrab’s admission in prestigious Indian Institute of Technology. It is the only hope for him to carve out a space for himself and his family in a country where politics of regionalism plays a key role and affects common man’s life and gives feeling of ‘otherness’.

Keywords— Parsi, family, nostalgia, betrayal, politics, cocoon, menace.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rohinton Mistry, the best-known Indian Canadian writer was born in Mumbai in 1952. He completed his graduation from the University of Mumbai. He immigrated to Canada with his wife in 1975. There he did his graduation again in English and Philosophy from the University of Toronto. Mistry’s novel ‘*Such a Long Journey*’ published in 1991, became an instant bestseller and received several awards including the Governor General’s Award, the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the Best Book and W.H. Smith Award. It was short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize and the Trillium Award. The present novel is based upon a series of real events that took place during the regime of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Mistry raises some problems of community and cultural crisis which are the main under the subaltern studies. The novel presents, through the fluctuating fortunes of the protagonist Gustad Noble, the socio-political turmoil of India. The present paper tries to put before us the glimpses of domestic melodrama in common man’s life.

Such a Long Journey, Mistry’s first novel, is a brilliant portrayal of Indian culture and family life set against the background of the subcontinent volatile postcolonial politics. The personal and political realities are intertwined. Mistry’s

focus is on the disturbing forces which threaten the peace of protagonist Gustad’s family life. For the better understanding of family melodrama in the life of common man, it is necessary to go through genealogy of the protagonist Gustad Noble. Gustad, his wife Dilnavaz, their two sons Soharab and Darius and daughter Roshan live in the Parsi residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay. Gustad’s grandfather was a prosperous furniture dealer, a lover of books and tasteful living.

His fortunes were squandered by an alcoholic son. He was a man of “stout-hearted as his own being”. The family was enriched by much more than just wood and dowels. The childhood days engulfed Gustad’s entire life. Gustad’s father was a lover of books and he had a book store. But during the illness of his father in the hospital, his younger brother reduced it all to shambles; bankruptcy invaded the family and the bookstore disappeared. Conflict envelops the life of Gustad Noble and his family. His life is the pilgrimage from the traumatic experiences of his father’s bankruptcy which in a way was worse than death. His life suggests that the simple religious parables of all religions inspire people and help them to grapple with their miseries and woes. As a father, Gustad was looking with hopes and ambitions at his own son Soharab. He was cherishing daydreams to regain

the lost dignity and prosperity of his family. So he resolved to cherish the dream of building and a fine bookcase. It was all in his view, 'a family need'.

"A small bookcase full of right books and you are set for life".

Gustad devotes his whole life to protect and nurture his wife and children. He is self-righteous, self-pitying, stubborn, authoritarian, and bad tempered man. He does everything he can for his family. As his hopes were focus on Sohrab, he makes possible with efforts to get his son admission in prestigious Indian Institute of Technology. Gustad's dream comes true when Sohrab passes the IIT entrance. In the celebration party, the gaiety atmosphere very soon ends into disastrous and violent mood of Sohrab. He announces his decision not to join IIT and instead pursue Arts programme with his friends. Sohrab thwarts his father's plan. Sohrab bursts out: "It's not suddenly I'm sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I'm not interested in it. I'm not jolly good fellow about it and I'm not going there."

At this Gustad's ambitious thoughts and Sohrab's refusal creates an axis of tension between father and son. As a natural outcome of this tension, Soharab leaves the house. Gustad averts Sohrab's every comment and suggestion. Gustad cannot control his anger when Sohrab speaks of his democracy against his father. When Sohrab explains the anagram Mira Obili and Bilimoria and suggests ways of spending of money received from Jimmy, Gustad springs from his chair without warning and aims a powerful slap at his face: 'Shameless!' Sohrab manages to deflect the blow "Talks like a crazy rabid dog! My own son!". Being a hostage of his own belief in authority and the institution of power, he cannot imagine spending of any of the money. Gustad's second son Darius falls in love with the neighbour's daughter Jasmine. He is a teenager with a romance for animals, a bodybuilder developing character and personal pride. He has an ill-starred romance with the "dogwalla idiot's fatty!". His actions made Gustad angry and he warns him: "I warned you not to talk to the dogwalla idiot's daughter". He warned Darius that nobody even his mother would not be able to save him from the terrible punishment. Gustad's relationship with his sons was filled with anger.

Gustad's traditional family ties begin to loosen. The reticent attitude of his wife is explicit when she reassuringly says to him, "We must be patient". His sharing of problems with his wife extended to the internal debate. Their debate was about the threat caused by the hot cash of Bilimoria. While he was

voicing harsh, she was taking an emotional stance. While Gustad is decision maker, she was only thinking about its execution. His world literally becomes her world. Gustad fights with his wife about whether his wife is right that Roshan has fallen dreadfully ill because Gustad has said it was not necessary to boil their drinking water.

Unlike his father, Gustad has vowed not to cry but to struggle on in life to maintain the security of his family cocoon. He finds another biggest threat to his family cocoon when mentally retarded Tehmul sees the ten lakh rupees through the window and gossips. Tehmul Lungra, a mentally retarded person is injured during the heated debate which culminates in stone throwing.

A beheaded a cat and a beheaded rat thrown in his tiny garden give him a mysterious warning to deposit the money in the bank and his threat becomes worse than before.

Gustad Noble is an affable middle-aged man of modest dreams and aspirations. His relationship with his daughter Roshan is more lovable than sons. On the contrary father-son relationship was filled with anger, quarrels, authoritarianism, rebellion etc. For the better health of his daughter and best friend Dinshawji, Gustad prays in the holy shrine of Mount Mary. While Soharab and Gustad are hostile to each other, Dilnavaz becomes a mediator between them. She accepts Miss. Kutpitia's help to bring a reunion between father and son. But Sohrab thinks that there is no chance to get reunited with his father because he knows that he is responsible for his father's unhappiness. "It is no use. I spoilt all his dreams; he is not interested in me anymore". Gustad experiences the sense of betrayal regarding his friend Major Bilimoria, his neighbor for many years in the Khodadad Building, when he left the house without a word of information to him. Gustad considered him a brother and referred to him as a possible model of excellence in physical and mental culture to his children. Major Bilimoria was very affectionate towards the children and they were all admiration for him.

The Major's abrupt departure hurts Gustad 'more than he allowed anyone to see'. His son's and friend's betrayal have a disconcerting effect on him.

He tells his wife: "I don't understand this world any more. First your son destroyed our hopes. Now this rascal, like a brother I looked upon him. What a world of wickedness it has become". Jimmy Bilimoria tries to make a heroic and glamorous game against Pakistan. He relishes the danger.

He is imprisoned on the charges of laundering money but what really happened is never known to him. He was used as a scapegoat by the cunning tactics of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In the witness eyes of Gustad, it is the incredible disintegration of a strong man into a pathetic and weak figure. Medication given to Bilimoria by the office seems that it is the medication that expedites the deterioration in his health condition. Even in a state of utter weakness, Bilimoria speaks about reality and fantasy where Research and Analysis Wing was hijacked for the personal use in the politics. Gustad's journey from Bombay to Delhi is symbolic of his journey towards the twin destination of destruction and healing. When he goes to Chor Bazar in search for Bilimoria's parcel he was bewildered by the "maze of narrow lanes and byways.... And so many people everywhere---locals, tourists, foreigners, treasure hunters, antique collector, junk dealers, browsers". It leaves him in confusion. The ten lakh rupees which Bilimoria entrusts to Gustad become Gustad's nightmare. It was an open rift in his family cocoon and menace for him through his own enforced, criminal involvement and his fear of losing family stability and job.

Major Bilimoria had been the stable centre of his domestic order, the guarantor of both human decency and national order. His journey to Delhi has brought for him a little harmony with his co-travelers but at the end he finds it corrupt, stronghold of the nation's enemies. His journey also brings himself betrayed.

This revelation destroys his final trust in the state but it gives him back the trust in friendship that he needs and wants to continue in life. Gustad realized that his friend come brother had been destroyed by his own loyalty and the corresponding depths of corruption strongly upheld by the central figure in the power. Major Bilimoria dies and Gustad is the lone witness at his funeral.

Gustad gets another blow by his next friend Dinshawji, when he tries to escape from his knowledge that there is no ultimate security in life by clowning and joking. Dinshawji finds many things unbearable in his life: his bossy wife "domestic vulture," the hostility between Indian religious groups, his menial position as a bank teller, his lust for typist Laurie Coutino at the bank, his responsibility for the criminal deposit in the bank of ten lakh rupees for Gustad and above all his terror of the cancer that has attacked him. Gustad sees a sequence of menaces to the domestic security of his family realm. Financial insecurity, Roshan's and his friend Dinshawji's health problem, a threat to the virginity from

Tehmul and Dinshawji, a threat of losing job due to illegal deposit of ten lakh in the bank, and above all unlawful political situation that imposes insecurity of life and occupation of Parsis etc were hammering to the courageous hero Gustad. He tries to ignore but accepts a lot and decides to cope to secure the cocoon of family.

II. CONCLUSION

Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* is a world in which all forms of corruption, knavery, hypocrisy, tyranny, ugliness and decay, have become the order of the day. The society which is depicted is completely deprived of resilience. The protagonist, Gustad who always remain a fearful man had tried to remain away from controversies.

The threats to Gustad's cocoon of security stem from disease, filial disloyalty, poverty, fear of unemployment, losing his nerve and getting caught up in criminal activity out of friendship. Gustad has to learn that there is no permanence in the absolute security of cocoon of the family.

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