

Political realities and subjugation of minority community in Rohinton Mistry's "such a long journey"

Rekha Sharma^{1*}, Suresh Kumar²

¹Research Scholar, NIMS University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

²Head Department of English, NIMS University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

E-mail: rekhashagun@gmail.com, drsureshkumar@nimsuniversity.org

* Corresponding Author

Article Info

Received 15 August 2023

Received in revised form 28 September 2023

Accepted for publication 10 October 2023

DOI: 10.26671/IJIRG.2023.4.12.107

Citation:

Sharma, R., Kumar, S. (2023). Political realities and subjugation of minority community in Rohinton Mistry's "such a long journey". *Int J Innovat Res Growth*, 12, 159-162.

Abstract

Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi writer from the Indian diaspora who now resides in Canada, writes with a keen awareness of all forms of exploitation of society's Minority Community. He writes about the common people and their struggles in the midst of social, political, economic, and personal turbulence. This piece of writing tries to highlight the political realities and subjugation of Minority Community in Rohinton Mistry's well-known book "Such a Long Journey". It takes into account the fact that a lot of contemporary Indian English novels focus on the historical description of the dominance of Minority Community. This paper would look at how Rohinton Mistry's well-known book *Such a Long Journey* reproduces the methods used to portray a significant period in the history of India through the depiction of political situations of that particular time and then look at how Mistry addresses topics like inequality and struggle of Minority Community in general and Parsi Community in particular. Like all other Parsi writers, Mistry is also an integral part of the community who expresses the worries of his community facing a dominant culture. By highlighting the political issues, he exposes all hegemonic tactics used by the majority people. People in the novel *Such a Long Journey* are no longer unaware of the betrayals being imposed on them; they feel betrayed by the political leaders and are no longer willing to believe in political discourse and the pitiful speeches of these politicians. Instead, a drama of deceit and fraud is being played in the name of political unity and a strong government.

Keywords: - Political, Government, Minority, Community, Inequality, Corruption.

1. Introduction

Introduction: Rohinton Mistry's debut novel, *such a Long Journey* (1991) was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Governor General's Award as well as the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book. The novel takes place in 1971, during the India-Pakistan War. However, its protagonist is a common family man and a bank employee, Gustad Noble. He is an insecure individual whose world still gets affected by the war with China in 1962. In a period of crisis and protests, Gustad's family's fate has an unwavering connection to the country as a whole. This paper explores the rigidly developed structure of political truths, that challenges the position of the common man who believes himself to be an independent, free entity who is the owner of his or her own free will, when in fact he is not. Citizens with Minority Community in post-colonial, post-independent nations are little more than puppets in the hands of the powerful authorities who guide the country in the direction they wish to. The backdrop for Rohinton Mistry's "Such a Long Journey" includes significant money laundering cases and national political events like the Bangladeshi War with Pakistan. The main subject that Mistry addresses in this novel is the political corruption by those in high positions of authority. The novel also reflects the sense of helplessness that the oppressed Parsi Community felt as a result of the rising Hindutva Fundamentalist elements supported by the government.

The poem "Journey of the Magi" by T. S. Eliot is referenced in the first pages of the book, prefacing the readers to the grim journey of human life in a universe that is existentially ridiculous and pointless. We get an overview of the complicated national political plots that affect the lives of the Minority Parsi Community in this book.



“A cold coming, we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey...”

T. S. Eliot, ‘Journey of the Magi’

Mistry speaks out against all political, social, and other violations of Minority Community, committed by the people in power. His first novel, such a Long Journey, highlights the socio-political issues that deplete the common people's will to survive. Actually, the tale of Gustad Noble and his friend exposes the intricate network of political corruption and scheming under the leadership of the Prime minister. The Bangladesh War with Pakistan in 1971 serves as the central theme of the book's plot. The story of Gustad Noble and his friend Jimmy Bilmoria in the book provides a realistic picture of the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. It also depicts the significant political events that occurred before the war between India and Pakistan. Through the perception of the Minority Community, the novel reveals the nature of national politics and its impacts on common people. In reality, due to the political class's insensitivity towards their community, all minority people experience a sense of anxiety and uncertainty. The story also addresses the serious issue of political corruption by the people working at the most senior positions of government, which destroys the lives of India's Minority Community.

The central character of the book, Gustad Noble, has a lot of affection for his friends Tehmul, Jimmy Bilmoria, and Dinshawji as well as his family. He is a devoted husband and a loving father who cares deeply about the wellbeing of his wife Dilnawaz, his children Raushan, Sohrab, and Darius. As the story starts, we learn that Sohrab, Gustad's eldest son has passed the IIT entrance exam. Ustad Noble is aware of the fact that his son is reluctant to join IIT as his future potential, as he is interested in pursuing Bachelor of Arts instead. On the occasion of Raushan's birthday Sohrab says, “Why can't you just accept it? IIT does not interest me. It was never my idea; you made all the plans. I told you I am going to change to the arts programme, I like my college, and all my friends here” (SLJ 48). Gustad was very upset by Sohrab's sudden rejection, and his broken heart still carries the memory of the day he lost his leg trying to protect his son from an accident when he was only five years old. Since then, Gustad has been walking with a limp. He bitterly says, “With holes in my shoes I went to work, so we could buy almonds to sharpen his brain. At two hundred a kilo. And all wasted” (SLJ 122). As a result, the novel's opening chapter introduces the theme of filial conflict between a father and a son, which is an everyday concern for many lower middle-class families in India.

The difficulties, annoyances, worries, and depressions of middle-class life have been addressed in this paper. The middle class comprises majority of the inhabitants of the Khodadad Building, and this story depicts their attempts to live an honourable life. Gustad's life serves as an ideal example of this. The little flat with no storage for his books, the wall enclosing the housing complex that serves as an outdoor urinal and the thin, watery milk they have to buy are all examples of middle-class existence. Their issues are political, social, moral, and financial.

The novel primarily discusses the national conflict between Bangladesh and Pakistan and how it affected India's economy. We begin to smell the aforementioned national scheme being addressed by the character in the novel as the story proceeds. When Dilnawaz asks Gustad about the prevailing situation-“What will happen now?” He ignored her question and read silently, about Bengali refugees streaming over the border with tales of terror and bestiality, of torture and killings and mutilations; of women in ditches with their breasts sliced off, babies impaled on bayonets, charred bodies everywhere, whole villages razed.” (SLJ12)

The above description depicts the genocide of Bangladeshis by the Pakistani army's western front during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. The Liberation Army, also known as the Awami Mukti Morcha Vahini, revolted against the oppression of West Pakistan and longed for a free state for the people of Bangladesh. As a result, West Pakistan started using violence to suppress the movement. It describes how the Pakistani Army intentionally harmed the innocent Bangladeshis, raped the women, and killed them in order to remove them from their territory. As a result, a significant number of Bangladeshi refugees immigrated to India, effecting the country's economy on large scale. The main conflict of "Such A Long Journey" is related to the secret financial support given to Awami Mukti Morcha Vahini by the Indian government and the significant money laundering case associated with it. However, India as a country succeeds in bringing justice to the racial minority of Bangladesh in East Pakistan by formally declaring war on West Pakistan. As a result, Bangladesh officially became a recognized nation on the geopolitical map on December 16, 1971, with the surrender of the West Pakistan Infantry.

The protagonist of the book, Gustad Nobel, who works in banking and has a poor income and modest aspirations, appears to be the center of the plot. The story's thematic structure includes well-known historical political events and wars. In fact, such a Long Journey is a novel about the struggle for the survival of a common man. The journey's primary themes are politics, history, and the desire for peace and individuality. In between political turmoil, the novel tells us that how corruption is prevalent in the political system, trapping the average man in its web and affecting every aspect of his or her life. Political propaganda thus becomes a hot topic of discussion across the nation. Dr. Paymaster's description of how a layperson feels about the nation's current political climate is as follows: “Our beloved country is a patient with gangrene at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rose-water over it to hide the stink of rotting tissues is useless. Fine



words and promises will not cure the patient. The decaying part must be excised. You see the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the gangrenous government at the center is removed” (SLJ313).

The sufferings of the Parsi community as a minority group in India are represented by Gustad Noble. Mistry's acute awareness of the plights of Minority Community is shown in a conversation when Malcolm Saldana says, "We are minorities in a nation of Hindus" (SLJ 23). Gustad feels completely helpless while dealing with his own concerns and issues, which makes him even more distressed when he considers the situation of India's minorities. In this novel he is presented as a responsible Parsi who is conscious of the uncertain future of the Minority Community residing in Bombay in the reign of Marathi in general and Parsis in particular in the following words: "No future for the minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America – twice as good as the white man to get half as much" (SLJ 55).

Hence it was the situation that minorities were facing in India, who are striving hard to survive in all circumstances and who have no relief from society or the current government's policies, particularly in Bombay. They are a minority that has no future, no security, and their situation is getting worse every day. In order to depict the current terror and psychological distress experienced by the Parsi community, Rohinton Mistry used a variety of metaphors and symbols, including Wall, Limpness, Vinca plant, Major Jimmy Bilimoria and Blackout paper.

A common metaphor is the compound wall, which surrounds the Khodabad Building. It provides the residents of the building with a sense of security while also serving as a mosquito breeding ground because the passersby have turned it into a public urinal. However, Gustad invites the street artist to use the wall as his canvas and decorate it with images of different gods, goddesses, prophets, and saints. The same wall turns into a sacred place for worship where followers present flowers and incense. The wall serves as a representation of the Parsi community's values and heartfelt support for every religion around the world. However, the municipality's decision to break down the wall to widen the road represents the threat to the security, existence and vulnerable condition of the Minority Community, who resides there. At the time of the demolition of the sacred wall, a fierce conflict takes place between the protesters and the workers, and in the dispute Gustad's friend Tehmul loses his life.

Common people just want to live in peace with their loved ones and want to see their families flourishing in safety and security, but the racial and discriminatory environment of the country is making everything difficult for them. They are even unable to understand why these wars are taking place and what good and benefit they are offering to the nation. The Parsi community has always been very quiet and peaceful, making a good contribution to the growth of the nation quietly. History and politics have a greater influence on common people, it pushes them into corruption activities. It also shows the unpleasant side of a self-centered government that has no concern about the common people and uses them as puppets to serve its own goals. A government is capable of making a mockery of democracy and stamping on it when the situations are favorable.

The corrupt and callous political system in our nation is capable of crushing even a man of such an impressive physical stature. The plot of the novel reveals an actual money-laundering episode in which the Parsi character Sohrab Nagarwala was found guilty of voice impersonation of the Prime Minister, shocking the entire country in general and the Parsi community in particular. The Prime Minister used Nagarwala as a pawn in her money scandals, and her narrative illustrates the corruption that exists in the highest levels of politics. In this book, Mistry has created the character of Jimmy Bilimoria as an Indian RAW officer to play the role of Nagarwala. Jimmy is held up as a key suspect in the money laundering case, which, in accordance with Mistry's narrative, was carried out on the Prime Minister's orders. The funds were intended to be secret financial aid to Bangladesh's Awami Mukti Vahini fighters. The Prime Minister uses her authority and position to transfer funds intended for the training of Bangladeshi freedom fighters to her son's business. Due to the Prime Minister's appeasement policy, Major Bilimoria's physically strong stature is reduced to an insignificant character and powerless figure. But as the narrative develops, we come to know that there is widespread political corruption, which exposes the top political leaders who were involved in this scam.

Jimmy Bilimoria's use as a scapegoat reveals the hollowness of the political system and the disregard for the people of the nation who are fed on the false words of patriotism. The Prime Minister used Billimoria for personal advantage, and then forced him to write the confession that he did as a result of his own enthusiasm for Awami Mukti Vahini fighters and that no one had forced him to do it. She exploited that simple man by arousing his love for the nation and for his country. Major Bilimoria says "She gave me a blank sheet and her own fountain pen. I wrote my confession like an idiot" (SLJ277). The worst part of the whole situation is that the prime minister received a formal confession from the major under specific circumstances. He was sent to jail and the jail hospital authorities locked him in, and under the pretence of his medical treatment, they gradually poisoned him.

"Such A Long Journey" serves as an example of how the political class in power misuse the constitutional institutions. In Jimmy Bilimoria's final days of imprisonment, when Gustad Noble refuses to meet him, Ghulam Mohammad insists Gustad to at least listen to him once by explaining him about the political conspiracy plotted against Jimmy Bilimoria. He highlights the political injustice in the following words:



“But the courts are in the pockets of the ones at the top. Those bastards think we are stupid, that we don’t understand what it means when the chief investigator suddenly dies in a car accident.’ He clenched and unclenched his fist. ‘Now it’s just a matter of time. Please go and meet Bili Boy. Before they finish him off. Please.’ (SLJ 233-234)

Ghulam Mohammad's observation reveals the judicial injustice done by the powerful people. Jimmy Bilmoria's tragic story is the story of every common man in India. The book ends with the terrible death of Jimmy Bilmoria who had become an innocent victim of the political system.

The common people observe the trivial concerns of their leaders that how they treat the people who are mere pawns for them. Analyzing and criticizing the decline of ethical values Gustad is informed by Major Billimoria that the people in power destroy all the traces of criminal activity while remaining guilt-free and giving the public the idea that this was essential for maintaining national security and unity. Beyond this, according to the very law known as MISA, killing people while they were in the custody of the police was a routine occurrence in the name of Maintenance of Internal Security Act. This era of the criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime left no room for any objections or evidence to be investigated. When Ghulam Muhammad was found guilty of supporting Major Billimoria, he was also killed in a road accident.

In order to give the entire political scenario a normal appearance, the state used all of its political and oppressive state strategies. However, the actual social experience of the common person, who is uninterested in political issues, separates the element of truth from that of the artificially constructed reality. Nothing is real; everything is created, false, and concealed. There is a prevailing spirit of treachery and deceit in the atmosphere. People cover their window panes with black sheets to block away the sunlight or the harsh reality of outside. The text addresses all political realities that underlie in nationalism, fundamentalism, extremism, and essentialism.

2. Conclusion

Mistry’s such a Long Journey is a political and economic tale, lamenting the unequal relations of power in society and ultimately his suggestions are closer to humanity for its healing. Humanity healing demands a collective effort for the beliefs of unity in diversity; it pleads for acceptance, for reconciliation, for accommodation and for adjustment.

Mistry has touched almost all major issues of India of his time in his novel Such A Long Journey, such as minority differences, political realities, wars, corruption in society and politicization of the crime. The concerns of the Parsi community as a dwindling minority and their cultural erosion, their nostalgia about a stable past also find a considerable space in the novel. Their rich Parsi culture and their identification with the rich imperial class, their positive contribution in the construction and building of Indian economy demand a reconsideration of all political decision and strategies being used by the political authorities, who are defining, designing and constructing India according to their own image in 1970s.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. Suresh Kumar, Head of English Department, NIMS University, Jaipur, for providing me invaluable guidance in writing this paper. I would also like to thank IJIRG for accepting my manuscript for the paper entitled “Political Realities and Subjugation of Minority Community in Rohinton Mistry’s “Such A Long Journey””.

Conflict of Interest

The Author’s declares that no conflict of interest in this manuscript.

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