



Journeys of Belonging and Ethical Survival in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*

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Abstract

This paper examines Rohinton Mistry's Such a Long Journey as a narrative that redefines the idea of journey beyond physical movement into psychological, ethical and cultural dimensions. Set in post-independence India the novel foregrounds the experiences of the Parsi minority through the life of Gustad Noble whose personal struggles mirror larger social and political anxieties. This study argues Gustad's journey; it represents a diaspora without migration where displacement is experienced within the homeland. He gradually changes and reshaping his understanding through experiences of betrayal, political corruption and moral disappointment. Mistry characterise personal histories into the national events and official narratives becomes under the pressure of power. Religion, belief, superstition and storytelling do not provide certainty. Instead, they support people in suffering loss and uncertainty. Such a Long Journey emphasises forgiveness, persistence and moral responsibility over heroic victory. It addresses a universal human experience characterised by alienation, resilience, and moral struggle through its constant use of journey motif. This analysis contributes contemporary literary discussion on diaspora, minority identity and post-independence Indian fiction.

Keywords: journey motif, diaspora, identity, post-independence india, survival.

Introduction

Rohinton Mistry is widely recognised for his nuanced portrayal of ordinary individuals whose lives are shaped by larger historical and political forces. *Such a Long Journey* published in 1991 is set in Bombay during the early 1970s a period marked by political uncertainty, economic strain and growing authoritarian control. In this context, Mistry portrays the daily life of the Parsi community. It's a minority community negotiating their identity India after Independence. The novel focusses on Gustad Noble,

a middle-class bank clerk whose personal struggles reflect the broader issues of a nation.

The concept of journey in *Such a Long Journey* operates at multiple levels. While the narrative includes moments of physical movement such as Gustad's trip to Delhi the primary emphasis lies on an inward journey shaped by disappointment betrayal illness and loss. Gustad's aspirations for stability security and moral order are repeatedly undermined by forces beyond his control. His son's reject to follow an expected path, his friend's political



betrayal and corruption of public institutions slowly weaken Gustad's trust in personal relationships and national ideals. The journey becomes a symbol for psychological endurance because of this anxiety. The novel's portrayal of diaspora without physical movement is among its most remarkable features. Gustad is still in his homeland but his minority identity has left him feeling very alienated. Living within the nation he nevertheless feels excluded marginalised and rendered powerless by political authority and social indifference. This internal displacement is a reflection of the diasporic experiences. It typically linked to exile and psychological strain. Mistry explores how minority status may lead to displacement even in familiar environments through Gustad's consciousness.

Mistry complicates the journey by personal narratives with national history. War, politics and the power intrude upon personal and public life. In this novel history shaped by rumours, gossip and fragmented memories. This narrative challenges truth. Religion, superstition and storytelling play a crucial role in sustaining characters during the crisis. These things give psychological reassurance and uncertainty. Mistry portrays, survival not as triumph but as ethical perseverance. The journey in *Such a Long Journey* becomes a movement towards forgiveness, acceptance and responsibility. The novel offers human reflection on endurance, dignity and fractured social landscapes.

Journey, Identity and Inner Diaspora in *Such a Long Journey*

Critical responses to Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* have foregrounded the novel's complex engagement with history identity and ethical struggle through the recurring motif of journey. Rather than representing journey as a simple physical movement Mistry transforms it into a sustained psychological and moral process. Gustad Noble's life unfolds as a prolonged negotiation with fear betrayal and uncertainty making him a representative figure of minority consciousness in post-independence India. Early in the novel Gustad expresses his longing for predictability when he dreams of "a life where

nothing unexpected ever happened" a desire that reveals his deep attachment to order stability and moral clarity (Mistry 4). This longing becomes the emotional starting point of his journey.

Researchers have frequently examined the novel in relation to Parsi identity and cultural anxiety. Nilufar E Bharucha argues that the Parsis in Mistry's fiction is portrayed as "a community haunted by the fear of extinction and irrelevance" within the larger national framework (Bharucha 62). This anxiety is reflected in Gustad's obsessive concern for routine discipline and moral propriety. His insistence on tradition and ritual is not merely religious but deeply psychological functioning as a defence against social change. However, this defensive posture intensifies his alienation when the political realities of corruption betrayal and injustice intrude upon his private life. The motif of journey gains further complexity when analysed through diaspora studies. While diaspora is conventionally associated with physical displacement across borders Mistry presents a condition of internal exile. Gustad experiences profound alienation within his country. His marginal position as a Parsi intensifies his sense of exclusion as the nation increasingly privileges majoritarian identities. Scholars such as Peter Morey note that Mistry's fiction reveals "forms of displacement that operate within national boundaries rather than across them" (Morey 118). Gustad's withdrawal from public life symbolises this psychic displacement. His refusal to read newspapers and his decision to cover his windows with blackout paper signal an attempt to shield himself from a hostile external world. Mistry describes how "the blackout paper blocks both light and vision suggesting Gustad's desire to escape history itself" (Mistry 71).

Political history plays a decisive role in shaping this inward journey. Critics have emphasised Mistry's use of real historical events such as the Indo Pakistan conflict and the Nagarwala case to expose the fragility of democratic institutions. Arun Mukherjee observes that the novel "demonstrates how state power operates through secrecy coercion and silence" particularly in its treatment of Nagarwala's trial and death (Mukherjee 89). Gustad



is deeply disturbed by the speed and opacity of the legal process because it undermines his belief in justice and fairness. His fear intensifies when he realises that truth can be manufactured and dissent suppressed. Mistry portrays this incident when a character remarks that “the truth is whatever the powerful say it is underscoring the erosion of moral certainty in public life (Mistry 214)”. The novel’s treatment of history resists linear narration. Instead, history appears as fragmented mediated through gossip rumours and personal testimony. This narrative strategy aligns with Linda Hutcheon’s concept of historiographic metafiction which emphasises the instability of historical truth. Although Mistry does not overtly theorise history his narrative practice reveals scepticism towards official accounts.

The journey thus becomes epistemological as well as emotional forcing characters to navigate uncertainty without reliable authority. Belief systems and superstition constitute another important dimension of the journey motif. Early criticism often dismissed Miss Kutpitia’s magical rituals as irrational or regressive. However later readings challenge this dismissal by situating superstition alongside institutional religion as a coping mechanism. Bharucha argues that belief in the novel “functions as psychological reassurance rather than theological assertion” allowing characters to survive moments of intense anxiety (Bharucha 74). Gustad’s prayers during illness and crisis echo this need for emotional comfort rather than doctrinal certainty. Mistry does not privilege one belief system over another but presents faith as situational rooted in fear hope and endurance.

Storytelling develops as a mode of resistance within the novel. Characters such as Dinshawji and Peerbhoy Paanwala transform suffering into narrative using humour exaggeration and satire to soften harsh realities. Storytelling endures relationship as well as interpreting confusion. Jaydip Sinh Dodiya observes that Mistry’s narrative style “refuses a single tonal register choosing instead to reflect the contradictions of lived experience” (Dodiya 133). The novel blends tragedy comedy

realism and satire mirroring the complexity of everyday life. Through storytelling the journey becomes collective rather than solitary enabling characters to endure loss together. The journey in *Such a Long Journey* is ethical rather than heroic. Gustad’s transformation does not conclude in victory but in forgiveness, acceptance and responsibility. His decision to forgive and loss reflects a form of resistance. The journey redefines success not as achievement but as survival with dignity.

Power Politics and Ethical Survival in *Such a Long Journey*

The journey motif as an inward ethical process this chapter extends the analysis by focusing on power politics history and moral responsibility in *Such a Long Journey*. Mistry sets ordinary lives within a turbulent political context. It showing how power, corruption and ideology shape personal experience. The journey in this chapter is not merely personal but civic forcing characters to confront the limits of loyalty belief and silence.

A major critical focus in discussions of the novel is Mistry’s representation of political power. *Such a Long Journey* portrays the state not as a protector but as a hidden and oppressive force. The fictionalisation of the Nagarwala case is central to this critique. Gustad is deeply unsettled by the sudden arrest trial and death of Major Bilimoria’s alleged accomplice because it exposes the fragility of justice. Mistry describes how the case is resolved with alarming speed leaving “no room for questions or doubts” which intensifies Gustad’s fear of authority (Mistry 176). The lack of transparency turns the journey into mistrust and conflict. Arun Mukherjee argue that Mistry uses this “to demonstrate how political power depends on silence and compliance rather than truth” (Mukherjee 91). Gustad’s anxiety arises not just from the event itself but from the awareness that resistance is dangerous and ineffective. Fear and not ignorance guides Gustad’s retreat from public life, where silence is his only shield against a punishing political system. The novel explores the relationship between power and naming. Identities, institutions and street names are repeatedly alter reflecting ideological



domination over space and memory. The renaming functions as a symbolic erasure of history and belonging. Gustad's discomfort with these changes reveals his attachment to a stable moral geography. Mistry notes that "familiar places suddenly acquire unfamiliar names leaving Gustad feeling disoriented and excluded from his own city" (Mistry 132). The journey here is spatial and psychological as identity becomes unmoored from place.

The representation of nationalism and the marginalization of minorities reveal another important aspect of power. Gustad is at a vulnerable position in the country. Critics contend that nationalism is portrayed in the book as removing minority voices and favouring majorities. According to Nilufar E. Bharucha, "Mistry exposes how minorities are expected to display loyalty without receiving protection in return" (Bharucha 81). This idea is clearly seen in the way the state ignores Gustad's suffering, even though he remains strongly committed to his duties as a citizen. This unfair situation deepens his emotional struggle and makes him feel more alone. The novel uses the idea of a journey to highlight moral responsibility and personal belief. Characters like Ghulam Mohammed feel anger and want revenge but Mistry does not portray violence as the right response. He places a strong emphasis on moral responsibility, perseverance, and patience. Gustad understands that revenge brings only satisfaction and suffering. As Gustad reflects "hatred poisons the heart before it harms the enemy" revealing his gradual ethical awakening (Mistry 247). Storytelling continues to function as a counterforce to political oppression. Characters like Peerbhoy Paanwala use humour and exaggeration to turn fear into shared laughter. Critics note that storytelling exposes the absurdity of power and softening its seriousness. Jaydip Sinh Dodiya notes that Mistry's use of humour "humanises history and restores agency to ordinary voices" (Dodiya 141). Through narrative play the journey becomes collective enabling characters to endure political anxiety together.

The novel portrays of history resists closure. The deaths of political leaders are surrounded by rumours

and conflicting interpretations. Mistry offers historical truth remains inaccessible to ordinary citizens. This ambiguity aligns with Linda Hutcheon's argument that postmodern historical fiction exposes the historical knowledge. Gustad's narrative of events reinforces his powerlessness and ethical confusion. *Such a Long Journey* presents political and an ethical journey marked by restraint rather than rebellion. Gustad is an ordinary man trying to uphold compassion, integrity, and dignity in a corrupt system. His experience serves as an example of how patience, forgiveness, and silence may be necessary for survival.

Conclusion

The journey is portrayed in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* as a human experience shaped by struggle instead of exile. Through Gustad, the novel foregrounds how ordinary citizens navigate political corruption, betrayal, and uncertainty within daily life. Gustad's way marked by loss and disillusionment, it gradually evolves into acceptance, forgiveness and responsibility. The novel's diaspora without migration challenges of displacement. Gustad shows how social exclusion, political marginalization, and minority identification may all lead to estrangement within one's own nation. The psychological trip that results from this internal exile is as intense as that caused by physical dislocation. Mistry highlights the vulnerable condition of minorities in post-independence India by placing this experience within the Parsi community. where protection or a sense of belonging are not guaranteed by allegiance. The travel metaphor is further complicated by Mistry's account of national history. War, corruption, and governance are examples of political events that invade private lives and expose the vulnerability of common people under authority. Religion, superstition, and imagination in *Such a Long Journey* do not offer clear answers or certainty. They give emotional comfort with fear and confusion. Mistry does not glorify these beliefs. He shows how they grow uncertainty and anxiety. Storytelling helps characters cope with pain by turning private suffering into something shared,



which helps them survive and stay connected to others. The novel rejects stories of easy success. Gustad's journey does not end in victory but in moral strength. Mistry's vision is seen in Gustad's ability to accept loss, forgive and dignity. The novel suggests that surviving with integrity can be a meaningful achievement. By portraying life as a continuous moral struggle. The novel offers a thoughtful reflection on resilience, identity, and in an uncertain world.

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