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Rohinton Mistry's *Such A Long Journey*: An Immigrant's Rendition of Cultural Amnesia, Nationalism and Politics of Dislocation

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The term 'Diaspora', which derives from the Greek verb 'diaspeiro' usually refers to the huge scale of involuntary immigration, over the ages like the African Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the expulsion of the Jews from the middle east, only to mention a few. It is only from the middle of twentieth century, it took a crucial turn towards voluntary migration, mostly to the western countries and this marks the beginning of a new discipline, called "diaspora studies". All these forms of migration usually address the issues of dislocation and relocation of selves and their yearning for their lost origins, with a few traces of deviation.

Rohinton Mistry, who is a Parsi Indian, immigrated to Canada at the age of twenty three. His fame as an eminent writer also fails to alter his status as a second class citizen in Canada. But even in India he had never been a complete insider, since he belongs to a marginalized ethnic group. Despite being twice displaced in two different parts of the world, he clings to bring to the fore the exploitation and marginalization of minorities and people, belonging to the unprivileged sections of Indian society, mostly Parsis in his works. He also endeavors to retrieve the indigenous Parsi culture, which is long suppressed by the dominant cultural ideologies present in Indian society.

This paper intends to throw light on how Mistry in his first novel *Such A Long Journey* (1991) brings forth the humiliation and unease in the lives of Parsis and people from the lower strata of the society in the hands of the dominant ideologies in the society. This domination is further led towards the cultural domination which denies the very heterogeneity of other cultures. Thus in a way this paper aims at exploring how Mistry here attempts to problematise the homogenous form of nationalism and cultural essentialism to unravel the oppressive nature of these ideal concepts and the assimilationist politics of multiculturalism, which most of the times remain under the façade of the concepts like unison of different cultures, "unity in diversity" and so on.

Rohinton Mistry's first novel *Such A Long Journey* (1991) delineates the story of a Parsi family, like the stories of his first collection of short stories, entitled *Tales From Firozsha Baag*. The unfolding of the narrative brings to the fore the day to day life of Gustad Noble's family with minute details of their physical surroundings in a shabby, dilapidated Bombay apartment block. The novel deftly captures the elements which govern a family at a very rudimentary level. Starting from the family celebrations and the strife between the generations, it also depicts limpidly the husband-wife bickering, the children's education and hobbies and hopes for future as well as the anxiety of the parents and escapades of the neighbours to that extent that at one point of time it seems that the novel may turn out to be a domestic comedy. But with the course of narration it becomes evident enough that the domesticity and the other family affairs continue to serve as a backdrop against the larger socio-political upheavals which tend to torment the family order. While being within the very circle of Parsi community, the novel subtly transcends

the very barrier of parsi community and brings to the fore the turbulence of political conflicts and notorious power struggle in changing scenario of the subcontinent. Mistry has deftly manifested the complications in the lives of those who are living in the margins and how the personal lives of these people are deeply influenced and at the same time harried by the political phenomenon and vice versa. With this intertwinement of personal and political crop up the very concepts of “personal political” and “political personal”, which also leave a huge imprint on his second novel *A Fine Balance*.

The protagonist, Gustad Noble is a simple bank clerk, who works hard to keep his family away from the plight of poverty. But the story takes a different turn in his innocuous attempt to help his friend Major Bilimoria with an intention of lending a helping hand to the victims of East Pakistan and the guerilla attack to supplant the domination West Pakistan. He embarks on diverting Government funds and thus in turn is trapped by the cunning strategy of the government. Politics, as a theme in *Such A Long Journey* has many facets. Unlike his second novel, it is not explicit in nature, rather Mistry brings forth the multifarious tenets of politics from a distance. Besides the subtle portrayal of the exploitation of the common people, due to the prevalent power politics in India, the novel also addresses the vision of nationalism and nation as a myth from a diasporic perspective, which is interspersed with a conflicting view of community in Post-independence India.

Mistry here questions the homogenization of Indian history and endeavors to deconstruct it to bring to the fore the very heterogeneity of existence. The life of a Parsi community in Khodadad building and their very experience embody the victimization of not only minorities, but also of the impoverished lots. But here his scathing criticism of dominant social forces is not that pungent compared to his second novel *A Fine Balance*. Mistry has addressed the issues of humiliation, unease and insecurity of the minorities in an India, which, with the passage of time starts patronizing parochialism and is relentlessly drawn towards right wing fundamentalism.

The volatile state of the common people and insecurity in their lives are clearly delineated against the backdrop of larger political turmoil. The novel is set in India of 1960s and 70s. But more seminally the life of minorities and of common people in Bombay and its suburbs during this period come to the fore. During this time India was undergoing a huge political turmoil. The end Indo-China war completely shatters Nehru’s dreams and “froze Jawaharlal Nehru’s heart, then broke it... he resigned himself to political intrigues and internal squabbles... and he no longer had any use for defenders of the downtrodden and champions of the poor, roles he had himself once played with great gusto and tremendous success” (Mistry 10-11). But soon after the Indo-China war “the Pakistanis attacked to try to get a piece of Kashmir as they had done right after the Partition and blackout was declared once again” (Mistry 12) and the plight of the common people continues. People are again compelled to cover their doors and windows with black papers, which is aptly exemplified through Gustad’s decision of not removing the black papers from doors and windows, despite his children and wife’s ceaseless request. The black paper signifies the unease, anxiety and the desiccated existence of the common people due to the incessant warfare between India and its neighbouring countries. The pangs in the lives of the downtrodden people are further worsened during the regime of Indira Gandhi. The novel deftly addresses the problems of poverty, unemployment among many others which the new rulers of Postcolonial India have failed to resolve. The sordid pictures of sufferings, tribulation and undernourished children recur again and again with the ramification of the novel. The

protagonist Gustad Noble impersonates the voice of the author to unravel those squalors, which festers the Indian Society. When he opens the newspaper,

He ignored the grim headlines about Pakistan, barely glanced at the half naked mother weeping with a dead child in her arms. The photo caption, which he did not stop to read because the picture looked the same as the others that appeared regularly in the past few weeks, was about soldiers using Bengali Bengali babies for bayonet practice (Mistry 7).

This picture of endurance reaches its consummation in the depiction of a woman who sells candles for prayers in front of the church of Mount Mary. When Malcolm, Gustad's friend tells him to keep walking and advises him to ignore her, the old wails "and called after them. If everybody buys near church only, what will happen to me, henh? How will I put morsel in my mouth?" (Mistry 225). Gustad's concern for these underprivileged lots is deftly shown when he chides the shopkeeper and says "You have no sharam, a big donkey beating a tiny girl" (Mistry 199), since she is sneaking into his shop and gaping at those milk bottles out of sheer hunger. Gustad offers her and her friends three bottles of chocolate milk.

The problem of unemployment in postcolonial India leaves a huge imprint on the very psyche of the people. This has been aptly fictionalized through Gustad's anxiety for his elder son Sohrab, who instead of joining IIT, wants to opt for B.A. The helplessness of Gustad and the problem of unemployment clearly resonate through his speech when he tells Sohrab: "For the last time, take my advice...Forget your friends, forget your college and its useless degree. Think of your future. Every bloody peon or two paisa clerk is a BA these days" (Mistry 69). This view of Gustad is further reinforced by the manifestation of the street artist, whom Gustad appoints to paint the black wall in front of his apartment with the pictures of the idols to dissuade the pedestrians from excretion. He is the epitome of the curse of unemployment, despite being a graduate. The pangs in the lives of minorities and common people is heightened during the regime of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, with the implementation of several taxes, like refugee tax, in addition with the existing ones and the denial of the fundamental rights of the people during the Emergency in India. The suppression of these marginalized voices by the dominant ones and the inegalitarian nature of the Indian society which remain under the very façade of democracy have been rightly satirized by Mistry. It is resonant enough of Balram Halwai's clear observation of Indian society of the present era in *The White Tiger*: "...in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up" (Adiga 64).

These sordid details of squalor, unnerving tribulation of people, abject poverty, and curse of unemployment and deprivation of people from their fundamental rights again and again challenge certain notions like "India is shining" and democracy among many others. Mistry in this novel endeavors to dig out those long suppressed voices which have been co-opted by the dominant political ideologies. The focus on these dominated lots is fused with their attempt of resistance. Dinshawji, Gustad's friend and colleague acts as the torchbearer of the rights of minorities and the oppressed people. Though his humour sometimes appears to be scatological and sexist, but through his voice Rohinton Mistry has brought to the light the resistance to the dominant political forces. This is evident enough in his discontentment with the change in the naming of the roads and cities. When his friend Gustad dismisses the entire activity as frivolous he retorts:

You are wrong, names are so important. My whole life I have come to work at Flora fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with all these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out just like that? Tell me (Mistry 74).

Historically speaking, the very origin of Parsi community can be traced back to The Sasanian Empire or Neo-Parsian empire, which was founded by Ardashir I in 224 A.D. But after 622 A.D. the Sasanian Empire was debilitated during the reign of Khosran II because of his campaigns which had actually worn out the Persian army and Persian treasuries. The decline of the Sasanian Empire was further precipitated by the economic decline, heavy taxation, religious unrests and the increasing power of the landlords. This threadbare Persian Empire failed to resist the repeated attacks of Arab invaders during 638 A.D. and 641 A.D., which leads to the fall of the Sasanian Empire. With this fall the Zoroastrian religion was replaced with that of Islam and it became the official religion. But the Persian culture and language were appropriated by the invaders. Though the majority of the people cringed before this change and finally accepted it, but a minority preferred to cling to their religion and strive for their rights. But the confrontation ended with the defeat of the Zoroastrians and their escape to other countries. Most of them took refuge in India, mostly in the western part, since India was well connected with the southern Iranian Ports. There in Gujrat the local ruler Jadav Rana prohibited them from using Parsi language or to dress in Persian robes, which in turn resulted in 'cultural amnesia' of these Parsi people. But their language, religion and culture were again restored during the Mughal regime. But the colonization of India by the British in the 18th century brings to the fore a complete different story. A majority of Parsis, in an attempt to become like Englishmen, associated themselves with the western language and their way of life. But others refused to be associated with the British and persisted on a strong sense of nationalism and their indigenous culture.

So it's quite evident that since the fall of Sasanian Empire the Parsi community has undergone several stages of dislocation as well as relocation of their own self, which in turn generate a strong sense of heterogeneity and hybridity even within the very community itself. Rohinton Mistry in *Such A Long Journey* is much inclined towards the formation of the imaginary concept of nationhood, in Postcolonial India, which has erased the very indigenous culture of the Parsis and are pushed into the margins. Mistry endeavors to retrieve their own culture, which is long suppressed in the documented narratives and brings to the fore the heterogeneity, dichotomy and ambivalence which characterize the Parsi existence in India. He also shows how the dominant socio-political ideologies and documented narratives co-opt the very ethnic identity of the Parsis. Mistry here goes deep into the very crux of Parsi existence in India, and the focus on the lives of the denizens of Khodadad building unveils the vivid details of their day-to-day life, religion, food habits, and funeral rites and so on. These minute details of Parsi culture and their way of life stand as a sharp contrast to the homogenized concept of nation and nationhood. These minute details of the lives of Parsi people create an alternative nationalism which defies stability and fixity and welcomes fragmentation and disintegration. Mistry's own rendition of an alternate view of nationalism leads him to dismantle the walls of supposed permanence, which constrains Parsis from the outside world. He is also critical of the geopolitical boundaries which are drawn between the countries like India and Pakistan and India and China. This fragmentary nature nationalism is more exposed towards ambiguity and ambivalence, which is deftly addressed by Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands*: "Writers are no longer sages dispensing the wisdom of centuries. And those of us who have been

forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us” (Rushdie 13). This view of Rushdie is reminiscent of what Geoffrey Bennington proposes about the very concept of frontier in his essay “Postal Politics and the institution of the nation”: “The frontier does not merely close the nation in on itself, but also immediately, opens it to an outside, to other nations. Frontiers are articulations, boundaries are, constitutively, crossed or transgressed” (Bennington, ed. Bhabha 121).

Mistry in *Such A Long Journey* endeavors to create a picture of Parsi life, based on memory and imagination. The day-to-day life the inhabitants of Khodadad building, Dinshawji, and Major Bilimoria reflect the complexities, faced by those who live in the margins. But despite being in the margins their openness towards their children is reverberated when Gustad’s elder son Sohrab tells Gustad in front of Dinshawji “I’m going to drink the rum if no one wants it” (41). Though Gustad accepts it with a dilemma in his mind but he doesn’t reprimand. Religion and the day-to-day life of the denizens of Khodadad building beautifully merge together in this novel, which in a way determine the unique ethnicity of the Parsis.

The first light of the morning barely illuminated the sky as Gustad Noble faced eastward to offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda. The hour was approaching six and up in the compound’s solitary tree the sparrows began to call. Gustad listened to their chirping every morning while reciting his Kusti prayers... the metallic clatter of pots and pans began nibbling at the edges of stillness. The bhaiya sat on his haunches, beside the tall aluminium can and dispensed milk into the vessels of the housewives (Mistry 1).

The funeral rites of the Parsis bring to the fore another scale of their unique ethnic identity, which is further explored through the detailed description of funeral prayers after Dinshawji’s death. “The corpse is carried carefully to the upper bungalee, which had a little verandah in front leading to the prayer hall, and a bathroom where the deceased would be given the final bath of ritual purity” (Mistry 246). But after the accomplishment of all these rites, the two men carried the body to an empty room, clothed in white and “laid it on the low marble platform. The face and ears were left uncovered by the white sheet. A priest arrived and lit an oil lamp next to Dinshawji’s head” (Mistry 247). The description of dustorji’s prayer which penetrates the every nook and corner of the room adds serenity to the very conventional ritual of the cremation. But the very distinct ethnic identity of the Parsis is consummated in the very reference of The Tower of Silence, where the corpse of the parsis are led to hang it from a tree for the vultures to eat up. Gustad’s acquaintance with other religion is redolent enough in his friendship with Malcolm who is a Christian. Even in his childhood he used to visit the church with Malcolm. But this familiarity with other religion is intertwined with his pride in his own religion and his own ethnic identity, which is perfectly echoed through his speech. “...Our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before son of God was even born, a thousand years before the Budhha, two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam?” (Mistry 24). Though the influence of Parsi religion on other religions is entirely Mistry’s own view, but it’s quite evident enough that Gustad’s own pride in his own religion in a way embodies Mistry’s own pride.

Besides the portrayal of the indigenous Parsi culture Mistry subtly demonstrated the very notion of ‘hybridity’ which permeates the Indian society and leaves an imprint on the Parsis. Though he has not gone very deep into the impact of hybridity on the Parsis to highlight their aboriginal culture and practices but the few traces which are left throughout the novel are apt

enough to counter the essential Indian culture propagated by the dominant narratives. Gustad's preference to read "The Times of India" instead of the Parsi newspapers like "Jam-E-Jamshed" is one of the several traces of hybrid culture. This notion of hybridity which engulfs the Indian society brings to the fore the gaps and silences in the very discourses of essential Indian culture, which excludes the heterogeneous cultures of the muted groups of the society. The very concepts of unity in diversity, coexistence and unison of several cultures unveil the undercurrent of cultural politics which apparently remains under the façade of the politics of multiculturalism. The politics, played by the privileged classes is in a way contrived in nature, where most of the times the consent mode of ideology dissemination is conspicuous enough. The promotion of the core Indian culture in a way surreptitiously denies the existence of other cultural ideologies and they are pushed into the margins so that the hegemony of the privileged cultures remains undisputed.

Thus the detailed analysis of Parsi culture, their religion, food habits, and their day-to-day life is an attempt to rediscover their forgotten past, which is long suppressed by the dominant ideologies in the society. Mistry's nostalgia and a longing for their past and 'origin' are clearly echoed from Gustad's own reminiscences of his childhood days, when there were abundance everywhere around him. This prosperity of his father stands as a sharp contrast to his present volatile state. Thus Stuart Hall rightly proposes that the heterogeneity and diversity of the people who have been uprooted from their own land and are compelled to relocate them in an entirely new ambience engenders an urge within them to go back to their lost origins. But he states that:

this return to the beginning is like the imaginary in Lacan, it can neither be fulfilled nor requited and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery, in short the reservoir of our climatic narratives (Hall, ed. Rutherford 236).

Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi Indian left India in 1975 and relocated himself in Canada. Though the very process of immigration has been continuing over the ages, but from twentieth century onwards it takes a different turn towards voluntary migration and wide scale dissemination. There are several factors like civil warfare, political upheavals, partition only to mention a few, which expedite this very process of immigration mostly to the western countries. But among all these factors, the most crucial one is the economic factor which encompasses a vast range of economic problems in third world countries like the problem of unemployment and economic instability and so on. These diasporic writers along with the other writers who come up later during the era of postnationalism open up a new form of nationalism, which defies the concept of nationalism, propounded by the early postcolonial thinkers. This diasporic space is filled with ambiguity and ambivalence, where heterogeneous experience of the other ethnic groups are emphasized, rather than placing themselves on the fringes of the nation as outsiders even though they are on the inside, by drawing a façade of stability and fixity. So their attempt to rediscover these unheeded voices in turn establishes a plurality of nationhood in contrast to essential nationalism and nationhood. Thus in a way *Such A Long Journey* is an epitome of Mistry's own view of nationalism, which follows the very definition of diasporic experience, laid down by Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora":

The diaspora experience...is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite differences: by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those, which are

constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference (Hall, ed. Rutherford 235).

But the very reference to the past glory and splendor, also brings back the vulnerability of the minorities in India, which has been continuing over the ages. Gustad's occasional visit to Crawford market to buy chicken or beef turns out to be a nightmarish experience to him. This is aptly resonated through his speech:

Perhaps it was due to their different circumstances: his father always accompanied by at least one servant, arriving and leaving by taxi. Gustad alone, with his meager wallet and worn basket lined with newspaper to soak up meat juices that could start dripping in the bus, causing embarrassment or worse still, angry protests from vegetarian passengers (Mistry 21).

Though Gustad's father was also a victim of social marginalization but he had enough money and power to stay away from this tantrum. But for common people like Gustad, the humiliation and ignominy faced by them clearly indicates how cooperation, tolerance and affability have ceased to exist in Indian society due to this oppressive form of nationalism. His visit to Crawford market is no longer a personal affair; rather it may precipitate communal riots between Hindu and Muslims. *Such A Long Journey* is not a novel which only showcases the victimization of minorities, mostly Parsis, but it also captures the plight of the common people and the impoverished lots and their perennial desire for stability and permanence in their lives. This intention of Mistry is rightfully achieved through the experiences of the street artist whom Gustad has appointed to paint the black wall in front of his apartment with the pictures of idols and prophets of different religions to restrain the pedestrians from excretion. Since the black wall provides refuge to different religions, so it becomes a religious place for the people of different religions and the money offered by them becomes a source of income for the artist. So with the course of time he starts yearning for permanence in his life which the black wall generates in him. "The...black wall were reawakening in him the usual sources of human sorrow: a yearning for permanence, for roots, for something, he could call his own, something immutable" (Mistry 184). But his longing for stability in his life is thwarted when during the emergency the black wall was caved down under the government road widening programme. His helplessness and vulnerability is rightly resonated through his speech:

He rose and went to Gustad. 'I am very grateful to you for providing me with the wall's hospitality. Now it is time to go. Where does not matter sir'. 'In a world where roadside latrines become temples and shrines, and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where'. ...and slipped out through the gate, paddling softly in his bare feet (Mistry 338).

But the situation of the common people is further worsened with the rise of parochialism, which is subtly fictionalized by Mistry through the atrocities of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and their claim for a separate Maharashtra for Marathis, which was also patronized by the then prime minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi and other rightwing fundamentalists. These humiliation, unease, and insecurity in their lives challenge the very ideas of democracy and 'unity in diversity'. These pictures of the exploitation of the minorities and common people throw light on the oppressive nature of nationalism, which remains unheeded under the façade of solidarity between different cultures and religions. But instead of cooperation, friendliness and unison the dominant ideologies in the society prevail over the marginalized ones and in Postcolonial India,

the colonization and domination of the British is replaced with that of the native elite class. This very inequality, and inegalitarian social order indicate what Simon During says in his essay “Literature- Nationalism’s other? The case for revision”: “Yet nationalism is something other than imperialism writ as large as this. It is quite specifically, the battery of discursive and representational practices, which define, legitimate, or valorize a specific nation-state or individuals as members of a nation state” (During, ed. Bhabha 138). This view of During is further led by one of the notable postcolonial critics and the pioneer of Subaltern studies in India Partha Chatterjee. He proposes that the idea of a nation in nationalist movement is basically modeled on the very concept of modernity of the west, where the formation of a nation is accomplished in three stages. In the very first stage the natives adopt modern western ideas of progress and modernity. The second stage marks the beginning of a turn towards the folk and popular cultural forms by the native elite class so that to generate both mass support and an identity based on the local cultures. But the most crucial stage is the third stage where the fusion of the western models and folk elements is projected as a native nationalism by the elite. So this very process of the formation of nation and nationhood clearly shows how the socially relegated classes and tribal people are being deliberately spoken of by the elites, where their own voices remain perpetually unheeded in the documented narratives.

But the traces of resistance to this particular form of nationhood recur again and again throughout the novel, mostly in the form of their indignation towards the very concept of nationalism. Though there are several references of resistance, but the very conversation between Gustad and his colleague Dinshawji, reverberate their resentment towards the very concept of nationalism. When Gustad states that nationalism has turned out to be a big failure everywhere in the world, Dinshawji replied by addressing the then prime minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi that:

she is a shrewd woman, these are vote-getting politics. Showing the poor that she is on their side. Saali always up to some mischief. Remember when her pappy was Prime Minister and he made her president of Congress Party? At once she began encouraging the demands for a separate Maharashtra. How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused. And today we have that bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens (Mistry 39).

The insecurity in the lives of Parsis and others, belonging to other ethnic groups is further highlighted through the unprecedented attack of a group of racist ruffians, even inside the bank premises and their racist slogan: “Parsi crow eaters, we’ll show you who is the boss” (Mistry 39). Mistry’s scathing criticism of this particular form of nationalization, propagated by the dominant forces in the society is in a way delivered through Dinshawji’s denunciation of the very process of nationalization of banks. He clearly accuses Indira Gandhi for this nationalization of banks, which nearly ruins the respect which Parsis once had in banking sector.

Mistry’s attempt to repossess the past is consummated in his act of rereading the documented narratives of certain phases of India’s socio-political history. Mistry’s rendition of “The Emergency”, Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, during the Bangladesh liberation war brings into the light the underlying corruption and the power-politics, played by the then Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Gustad acquiesces to help his friend Major Bilimoria, to divert a huge sum of money. He believed that, by doing this he caters to the need of the insurgent activities and guerrilla warfare, which upsurges in the then East Pakistan to supplant the rule of the West

Pakistan. But eventually he was deceived by his friend Major Bilimoria. But the supposed deception of Gustad which was later clarified by Bilimoria unmasks a series of deception and a large monetary scam, which frames the innocent people like Bilimoria as perpetrators. Major Bilimoria's appointment as the Management consultant of RAW was itself a trick, played by Indira Gandhi. Due to his faith on Indira Gandhi, he blindly accepts the proposal of Indira Gandhi and makes a false confession of imitating the voice of the prime minister to safeguard her. But the sixty lakhs which was taken from the bank, which was supposed to reach the liberation army of Bangladesh in order to expedite the insurgent activities there in East Pakistan has not reached there, instead the fifty lakhs from the total amount was transferred to a private account for her own personal purpose. But when Major Bilimoria comes to know about the entire scam, after witnessing the wretched condition of the liberation army, he out of sheer indignation decides to swindle the rest of ten lakhs for him, his friend Ghulam Mohammed and Gustad. But he was accused of stealing the money and to withdraw money by emulating her voice, whereas no one enquired for the remaining fifty lakhs. He was imprisoned and rigorously tortured, which ultimately resulted in his untimely death. Rohinton Mistry endeavors to unearth those unheeded details of treachery and deception, which remain hidden in the documented narratives. These minute details of corruption and the deception of the common people for the sake of the privileged classes divulge how the dominant socio-political ideologies and forces exploit the common people and tend to paralyze their thought process to satisfy their unquenchable greed. This is aptly echoed through Gustad's own confusion over the entire fact. "The worldly wise Jimmy Bilimoria, the cynical major he had known for so many years, whose motto in life was: when in doubt, keep doubting. Could he really have done the foolish things he is describing? What kind of woman is she?" (Mistry 277-78). Major Bilimoria's discontentment and indignation towards the social order and prevalent power politics is limpidly reverberated in his own words: "I have seen so much...bribery, double cross, blackmail" (Mistry 278).

The rigorous torture of Major Bilimoria and finally his untimely death embody the innumerable miseries of the common people and minorities in the hands of oppressive dominant social forces. The unnerving tribulation of the common people and the denial of their fundamental rights are further intensified during the Emergency in India. Though Mistry unlike his second novel *A Fine Balance*, which is largely centered on the Emergency and its consequences, has not gone very deep into the implications of emergency, but has subtly demonstrated the unease and plight of common people, during this 'blackest hours' of Indian democracy. The tyrannical faces of the dominant socio-political forces come to the fore when the black wall in front of Gustad's apartment, which has turned out to be a place of worship for people from different religions was caved down under the government road widening programme, despite the relentless plea and huge protest from a large number of people irrespective of class, caste and religion to safeguard the wall. They castigated and questioned the steps taken by the government. "Look at the pictures of Brahma, Bishnu and Shiva. Look at Rama and Sita, Kali Mata, Laxmi, Jesus Christ, Gautama Budhha, Sai Baba. For every religion this place is sacred... How can you demolish such a holy place" (Mistry 327). This protest from mostly the underprivileged sections of the society epitomizes an attempt of resistance to the dominant social forces, though it ends with the death of an innocent person Tehmul.

This attempt of Mistry to dig out the discursive traces of Parsi culture and to reread the documented historical narratives to find out the fissures within it in a way maintains a stark affinity with Foucauldian concepts of archeology, problematization of history and historical

knowledge. Mistry has rightly manifested the deviation of Foucault from Heidegger's concept of history where he proposes that history, as a discipline is inclusive in nature. But Foucault reinterpreted history as history of discontinuities, which is basically a relationship between text and history, governed by the prevalent power politics and the knowledge produced by the existing equations of power and vice versa. So the identities of the individuals are constituted by these social forces, which in turn mold it accordingly and reproduce it according to social norms and values. Foucault questions these social identities of the individuals which in turn camouflage the subjectivity of the individuals and in this process certain sections people are forever relegated and co-opted by these dominant forces, which mars their ethnic identity. Thus Foucault suggests rereading and 'problematizing' the documented history in order to find out the discursive traces, left by the past history so that to write the history of present, which is the quintessence of his concept 'archeology'.

Social unrest, the rise of parochialism, and the exploitation of minorities and common people question the very concept of "imagined communities", imposed by the dominant ideologies and particular nation states on their individuals. The concept of "imagined communities", coined by Benedict Anderson, assumes a formation of community, based on another imaginary concept of supposed homogenous form of nation and nationhood. It differs from the actual form of community since it never prioritizes the everyday face to face interaction between the individuals. Anderson rightly says that a nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in their minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 224). This imagined community is a social construct which positions the individuals within certain discourses. This construction of a community, based on the shared characteristics of the individuals mostly goes in favour of the capitalists, and the privileged classes, where the perspectives and voices of the others always remain in the margins. Rohinton Mistry in his novel *Such A Long Journey* tends to destabilize and critiques this notion of "imagined community". The social oppression and the relegation of the minorities bring to the fore the discrepancies in the very idea of community, based on commonalities among the individuals. The anxiety and insecurity in the lives of the minorities and underprivileged lots are aptly reflected through Gustad's anxiety for his son Sohrab's future. "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" (Mistry 55).

Mistry envisions the Bombay of 1960s and 70s, as a place of heterogeneity, where people from multiple religions and cultural background stay. But the story of this diversity and heterogeneity remain suppressed under the very façade of homogenous Indian society. But unlike the mainstream texts Mistry here brings forth the discursive traces of heterogeneity, which is evident enough in his focus on the indigenous Parsi culture, the pervading effect of hybridity in Indian society and references of other marginalized groups in the society. This in turn leads him to establish an alternative form of community, which is largely dependent on the shared space between the members of different groups. The very description of the inhabitants of Khodadad building throws light not only on the Parsi culture and their day to day life, but also on the cultural and linguistic hybridity, which in present era is inextricably linked with the lives of Indians. This mainly comes to the fore with the reference of the language used by them which is an admixture of Gujrati and Parsi idioms. So the shared space is also ethnically and linguistically determined. But Mistry in this novel also tends to explore a possibility of a "shared space"

between the individuals which transcend their ethnic and cultural identity. Though it has not been manifested deftly in the very texture of the novel, but there are several traces which tend to unite the people based on their personal relationships and common interests. Gustad's acquaintance with people from different religions like his friend Malcolm, who is a Christian is one of them. But the huge scale of protest from people, from different religions and cultural backgrounds towards the climax of the novel consummates his effort to establish a solidarity and unity among the people beyond their cultural, religious and ethnic identity.

So the Bombay, which is presented here is a city of "unassimilated otherness" (Young 22), where people live together, without attempting to dismantle and erase the difference, but on the other hand by transcending the barrier of difference related to caste, religion, cultural background among many others, they embark on interacting with others. Thus Mistry endeavors to envisage a sense of community and unison among people, devoid of those social constructs like caste, religion, cultures, only to mention a few to acknowledge and privilege humanity above all.

Mistry's first novel apparently appears to be a detailed portrayal of the usual life of Gustad Noble's family and others, mostly in relation with the members of his family. But a deeper analysis of this text unravels the deeper political intention of this text, which comes to the fore with their day to day life, their interaction with others and the hurdles faced by them in their daily encounters. These minute details in turn open up different facets of this oppressive nature of Indian politics, the power struggle, cultural politics, gaps and silences in the documented narratives of Indian history, oppressive form of nation and nationhood and so on. These unnerving details of deception, exploitation and subjugation of the underprivileged lots and minorities reverberates Mistry's own discontentment. This is led further in his attempt to create an alternative form of nationalism, centered on the very heterogeneous culture of the marginalized groups and most viably of Parsis. But unlike some of the other postcolonial writers of mostly of 'postnational' era Mistry has strictly resorted to the very realistic portrayal of victimization and resistance to the dominant forces of the society.

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