

Tragic Gaiety in the Selected Novels of Rohinton Mistry

K. Ramya

Asst. Professor

G. V. N College, Kovilpatti

ramyanisharaj17@gmail.com

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Tragic gaiety transcends the calamities of life. Tragedy and joy refer to quite distinct concepts and thus do not oppose each other. Tragedy primarily refers to a form of verbal art. Tragedy signifies a vision concerned with the calamities of life and their effects on characters. Tragedy is not an emotional state but describes a situation. Thus, one can find oneself in a situation which is tragic, but one does not feel the tragic implications of that situation.

Joy, on the other hand, draws attention to an affective reaction towards a situation. Taken together, tragic joy or tragic gaiety describes a euphonious response towards a tragic situation. Informed by history's regenerative potential and the idea of an endless reappearance, tragic gaiety suggests displaying calmness in the face of rebellion and terror.

The Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India. They have contributed a lot to the society, economics, commerce, science, politics and literature. Rohinton Mistry is a writer with great honesty of imagination. He is one of the popular and most prominent novelists in Indian English Literature from Parsi community.

Rohinton Mistry was born on 3rd July 1952. He now lives in Toronto, but sets his novels primarily in his native Bombay, presenting an honest and loving image of India. During Mistry's stay in Bombay he learnt a lot about socio-political background of our country before he left for a new land. His novels focus on current political issues. He migrated and settled down in Canada even though he does not forget his motherland India. The main theme of his writing deals with India. The novels show his attachment, feeling and emotions for Parsi community and Bombay.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) brought him national and international recognition. The book concerns an ordinary man who becomes involved in the politics surrounding the Bangladesh supporter of independence movement in India and Pakistan. Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) concerns four people from Bombay who struggle with family and work against the backdrop of the political unrest in India during the mid-1970s.

Such a Long Journey and *A Fine Balance* have been one of the most remarkable and interesting novels. These novels foreground the heterogeneity of identity within Parsi community

and the dynamic nature of Parsi community itself. But his community does not figure much in his second novel *A Fine Balance*.

Rohinton Mistry's Indo- nostalgic novels, deal with the dark and grim side of life. His novels recognize and respect minority cultures which have been suffering from social injustice, elimination, marginalization, dispossession, dislocation and social discrimination. It exposes the corrupt governmental machinery and portrays the plight of the common people during Emergency.

The title of the novel, *Such a Long Journey*, is taken from T. S. Eliot's "*Journey of the Magi*" is really about the journey inward and the discovery there in of a new birth- a journey in which Gustad is confronted by three physical deaths but himself retains a heroic stature. Literally there are no significant journey in this novel expect the journey to Dinshawji's funeral which is followed by the journey to Delhi to see Major Bilimoria.

The long journey is already taken by Dinshawji, Major Bilimoria and Tehmul Lungraa and is a journey from hopelessness to hope. The hard times are over in the life of Gustad and he learnt that the everyday life is bound up with some uncontrolled forces over which man has no control. At the end of the novel a new journey begins in the life of Gustad that is of a consciousness that the quest is endless which involves countless journeys. Thus the journey is the repeated motif in the novel and it also symbolically reveals the conversion from one state of inner experience to another.

Such a Long Journey is not optimistic about India- partly, unavoidably, because it from the viewpoint of an insecure minority, the Parsis. But Mistry's surrounding vision is broader, its idealism tempered by a search for individual humanity and self- sacrifice against the odds of neglected poverty and pessimism. Symbolizing the broader vision is Gustad's prompting of a pavement artist to transform a black, aromatic wall near his apartment building into a wall painting of all faiths, "a sacred wall of miracles," of tolerance.

The novel's last public act is the demolition of this wall as part of a unessential road- widening scheme, coinciding paradoxically with an useless demonstration against municipal corruption. Out of this failure, though, Gustad salvages reconciliation with his son, and, chastened by others' suffering, he tears down his nervous blackout.

The blackout paper is not the only boundary erected and defended in *Such a Long Journey* in order to exclude an allegedly hostile environment. The compound wall of Khodadad Building becomes another line of defence, as it were, this time against the road widening scheme of which Gustad is so afraid. As an enclave of peace and respite, the compound provides the Nobles and their neighbours with a refuge from the noise and turmoil of Bombay.

Mistry uses major political events of independent India as the backdrop of his novels. There are two ways to read politics. First, in the sense of state and national politics and the second, in terms of cultural politics which focus on the role of the individual within family, the community and the nation.

The period of Emergency in 1970s is considered a dark period in the history of India in which people of different sections were affected severely. It was a cruel attempt to sustain power at the cost of democracy. *A Fine Balance* portrays the internal Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi and *Family Matters* has the consequences of Babri Mosque riots in 1990s.

The Emergency saw the suspension of the basic fundamental rights guaranteed to every Indian citizen by the constitution of India. The period of this novel begins with the year of the declaration of Emergency in 1975 and ends with Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Between these two important political events, the stories of Dina Dalal, her tailors Ishwar Darji and Omprakash Darji, her renter Maneck Kohlah and their contrasting friends are interlaced. The novelist pictures the struggles of these people to ensure their lives in Mumbai in the wake of Emergency.

The main action of *A Fine Balance* is framed between the opening chapter, 'Prologue 1975' and the concluding section entitled 'Epilogue 1985'. These were crucial years for the Indian nation: 1975 saw the declaration of a 'State of Internal Emergency' by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and in 1984, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard as vengeance for the Indian army's attack earlier that year on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest Sikh shrine. This attack caused the death of the Sikh religious leader, Jarnail Bhindranwale. Mrs. Gandhi's assassination triggered nation-wide riots and serious communal violence, with Sikhs targeted by furious Hindu mobs avenging the Prime Minister's murder.

The lives of all the characters in the novel are steeped in the realities of a wartime situation. Although the real war with Pakistan is at the frontiers, the scarcity of food supplies and the rationing affect the ordinary citizen. A sense of insecurity and a fear of attack are permanent. It is indicated not only through Gustad's dark, covered windows but also through the air raid sirens. War is the subject of discussion between colleagues during their lunch break and there is endless speculation about which side the US will ally with - India or Pakistan.

Mistry's second novel, *A Fine Balance*, to expose the corrupt governmental machinery and portrays the plight of the common people during Emergency. This novel sets out to document, in detail, the way in which election malpractices and misappropriation of power, affect the life of the poor rural migrant as well as the urban homeless. It is situated in the years immediately following the narrative period in *Such a Long Journey*, during the Emergency period.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* enact the loss as well as the process of meaning in various ways. But in addition to that, Mistry elaborates on his themes on a philosophical level as well as on an inter textual level. The relevance is once again not so much on cultural difference but on universals. With *A Fine Balance*, Mistry reproduces his concerns about the imbrications of national politics and the fate of the individual. The Parsis insecurity for being an ethnic minority in the country is reflected in the voice of Dinshawji in *Such a Long Journey*, and the voice of Dina Dalal in *A Fine Balance*.

Like other Parsi writers, Mistry's work is guided by the experience of double displacement. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* have helped him in earning a distinct place in the records of the post independence Indian English novel.

Works Cited

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