

Agony and suffering in the characterization of Gustad Noble in the novel *Such a Long Journey*

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Abstract

This paper shows the suffering of the family man, a patriarch who wants all should happen with his will and desire. He faces more adversity than pleasant life. He tries to adhere the life style of his parents but he fails. One can understand the changes that happen in the youth. It will definitely enlighten the adults as well as the youth. It will make everyone think about the reality of suffering in the family circle. It will surely find the readers worry and make them to look back their life style and changes through the character Gustad Noble. Politics also has its role in the life of Gustad. There is a clear picture of the feelings of the individual over the beloved son, friends and family.

Key words: Family, Individual suffering, accepting silently for the family

About the novel

Such A Long Journey was written in 1971 during the Indira Gandhi administration. It was the time of the India-Pakistan war, its protagonist is not a conventional hero. The main character of the novel Gustad Noble is a bank clerk and a family man who belongs to the Parsi community, a vulnerable figure whose world is haunted by the war with China in 1962.

Beginning of the long journey

Mistry has brought it in to light the opposition between the values of family and tradition and the corruption of the outside world. Gustad Noble has to experience a complete disturbance of his life owing to sudden blowing up of politics in his smooth everyday routine. Gustad belongs to the Parsi community and a devoted family man struggling to keep his wife Dilnavaz and three children out of poverty. The crisis and turmoil begins in his family when his eldest son Shorab refuses to join the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology and his youngest daughter Roshan falls ill. Gustad later on receives a letter from an old friend Major Billmoria pulls him to involve in the corruption of large amount of money. Thus the long journey of Gustad starts by shedding new light on all the aspects of both personal and political life of him.

Politics

Such A Long Journey is a unique attempt novel based on truth in Indian Fiction in English. The protagonist has the feelings of loss and insecurity with several chastening experiences. The novel is multi-layered which gives importance only to social and political details, as Mistry symbolizes on a middle class family of the Parsi community who lives in Bombay. The political theme of the novel is based on the notorious Nagarwala Conspiracy case of 1971. It is a real story that took place during Indira Gandhi's period in which Shorab Nagarwala, the chief cashier of the Parliament in the State Bank of India followed the highest forces in the country, found himself behind bar and died later in imprisonment. Supporting this Amiritjit Singh in Writers of Indian Diaspora states that: Like his short stories, Mistry's multi layered novel is about power and powerlessness, about the need for community in which the individual's voice is not muffled.

Gustad in adversity

Such A Long Journey is primarily the story of Gustad Noble, the little man holds on to his dignity, strength, and humanity in a sweltering tide of disappointment, confusion, betrayal, and corruption. (SLJ p 214) Gustad had full hope on his eldest son Sohrab, who was a bright and intelligent boy. He was very much excited that Shorab has got admission in the Indian Institute of Technology, but when he refused to join I.I.T. It led to anger and bitterness and a break in the relationship between the father and son. At the dinner Sohrab stated that: I'm sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I'm not interested in it. I'm not a jolly good fellow about it, and I'm not going there.... Fool yourself if you want to. (SLJ 48) Gustad was sad and angry because of his son's betrayal. Other bitterness and supposed 'betrayal' for Gustad was his best friend Major Jimmy Billmoria, who lived in Khodadad building. Bilmoria had disappeared one morning without any information. Later Gustad comes to know that he had gone to join RAW, a wing of Indian Intelligence Service. Due to the sudden vanish of his friend Gustad started doubting their friendship

...What happened to the great friend Jimmy Bilimoria? Our Major uncle? Where is he now, who used to come here all the time? Who I treated like brother? Gone! Disappeared! Without saying a word to us. That's friendship. Worthless and meaningless! (SLJ p 49)

Gustard Noble is a bank clerk. His devotion to his family, his faith in Zoroastrianism and his love for his friends and his community are continually tested through a series of adverse circumstances. "Loyalty and journeying constitute two major contrasting patterns in his life: the first entails constancy and commitment; the second, mutations and metamorphosis" (Malak 108). The sad predicament of Gustard evokes pity in the readers as the experience, fears, traumas and frustrations that he undergoes are those of a minority community, and in a wider sense, of all ethnic minority communities. Problems, that come one after another, dim his aspirations and make him distraught and helpless. He displays a strange fear that he

and his community are always targeted by others, which seems to be symptomatic of a syndrome. He observes the complex political cauldron of India with suspicion, and the anti-minority attitude of a section of the dominant community raises in him fears of an impending, disastrous ethnic cleansing awaiting his community.

Disappearance of Major Bilimoria from Kododad building was the first blow that Gustard felt. Bilimoria had been a loving brother for him and Gustard considered him as "a second father" to his children (14). The second blow that deeply affected his already disturbed mind was his first son, Sohrab's refusal to join IIT in spite of being qualified with high rank in the entrance test, and his bad manners at the birthday party of Roshan, both of which culminated in Sohrab's desertion of his home. Roshan's enervating diarrhoea; the complex episodes of events that followed Gustard's receiving a parcel despatched by Major Bilimoria containing ten lakh rupees; his bosom crony, Dinshawji's illness and eventual death; the death of Tehmul Lungraa, a juvenile delinquent inmate of Khododad building and the destruction of Gustard's sacred wall by the city authorities - all these and more conspired against the normal course of events in Gustard's life.

Major Bilimoria's disappearance, and the parcel that he had despatched, however, caused considerable havoc in Gustard's small world. As the arrest of Bilimoria on charges of impersonating PM's voice over phone and receiving a large amount of money to the tune of 10 lakh rupees, had been part of a major political conspiracy, Gustard felt as if he was trapped by traitors of various types. His ordeal that resembled an epic struggle involved physical and mental torture. Gustard's ultimate escape as the representative of an ethnic minority from the tyranny of time and circumstances culminated with a feeling of reconciliation, although he had to part with some of his best-loved friends. His survival was a morale booster to all minority struggles.

In the midst of the turbulent times with regard to his personal worries and problems, Gustard was doubly troubled when he thought about the position of minorities in India. As a conscientious Parsi, he was aware of the bleak future that awaited minorities in India in general, and Parsis in particular. For him Shiv Sena was the epitome of majority's violence against minorities.

Gustad roles as father

Such a Long Journey illustrates suffering of Gustad Noble who suffers at the hands of self-centred politicians and heartless officials. Gustad Noble is the central character in the novel is a classical tragic hero. He is passing from happiness to misery and is uneven against heavy chances. In the opening of the novel, Gustad Noble is seen as a god fearing man and envy of neighbours and all.

...his thick, groomed moustache was just as black and velvety. Tall and broad Shouldered, Gustad was the envy and admiration of friends and relatives whenever health or sickness was being discussed. For a man swimming the tidewater of his fifth decade of life, they said, he looked so solid. (SLJ 1)

Gustad Noble is a bank employee and a father of three children, two sons, Sohrab and Darius and a daughter, Roshan. His wife Dilnavaz and their children live in a Parsi Residential colony of khodadad Building. Then, Gustad has a few good and understanding friends like Major Jimmy Bilimoria and Dinshawji. They are the representative of middle class Indian family and Parsis.

Gustad is an ordinary man who had to face many trials in life. He has his own dreams about the future but his aspirations crumble down like cards. Indeed, Gustad Noble's dreams and expectations are modest. But, it is very hard to him that he cannot make things in such a way to fulfill his aspirations. He struggles with memories of a financially secure and emotionally stable past that serves to highlight his family's current struggles. Additionally, the outside world with its political intrigues and threat of war seeps are into their flat in the Khodadad Building. As the novel progresses, it finds Gustad's hopes, dreams, and ambitions being destroyed in a quite manner by his caring and weakness. First is the sudden disappearance of major Bilimoria from khodadad building who is like a brother to Gustad. Second, Sohrab's refusal his wish to join as an IIT student, whose bad manners spoils the ninth birth day party for Roshan. Third is that the protracted illness of Roshan, a complicated case of Diarrhoea. Fourth, Gustad's receiving a parcel from Major Bilimoria and the trouble thereafter to hide ten lakhs rupees. Fifth, that is Gustad's close friend Dinshawji's illness and his eventual death. Sixth is the death of Tehmul Lungraa, an idiot child of khodadad Building . And the last is the destruction of Gustad's sacred wall by the municipal authorities. All these events make a shakiness of his courage to balance the lifelong sufferings.

Sufferings of Gustad's family

The novel's every action starts in its usual smoothness way of life. Gustad's son Sohrab gets admission to IIT, a symbol of pride. So, Gustad plans to celebrate it on the ninth birthday of Roshan, in which his very close friend Dinshawji is too invited. He brings a live chicken into the house that also makes much embarrassment of his wife Dilnavaz. The initial atmosphere of humour, songs, and jokes are contributed in the party by Dinshawji.

The party comes to an abrupt end when Sohrab turns violent of freakish remarks. Because, he rejects his father's wish for joining IIT and he wants to join arts programme. Gustad Noble becomes disturbed by

his elder son Sohrab's disobedience. Thus, the father-son hostility continues from this point onwards. The sudden refusal of Sohrab not only shatters all hopes of Gustad but also makes a surprising turn in the later course of the novel. This may be the root cause for his worries.

Gustad's family gets more and more involved with sufferings as Darius falls in love with Mr. Rabadi's daughter and the sudden illness of Roshan. Besides, his close friend Major Bilimoria suddenly leaves from khodadad building without a word even to Gustad which upsets him. Gustad is already disappointed with the indifferent behaviour of Sohrab and now the disappearance of his close friend makes matters worst.

Misfortune

After few days, Gustad receives a letter from Bilimoria, who wants Gustad to receive a parcel from him. Gustad is ready to do the task in the name of friendship. However, he finds himself entrapped in complicated difficulties on opening the parcel. The parcel contains ten lakhs rupees to be deposited in the bank in the name of a non-existent woman, Mira Obili.

Thus, both Gustad and Dilnavaz, they do not know how to hide and protect such a huge amount. But, even before the amount is deposited the secret of amount is out. Gustad feels unwell at ease when Tehmul tells the inspector that the former has a mountain of money in his flat. Another woman also makes a reference to the money that gives to him utter shock. Thus, the prohibited package collapses Gustad's mind, happiness and he feels betrayed.

Fear and restlessness with two following days, Gustad finds a headless bandicoot at the base of his Vinca and again a headless cat in the compound. Then, a folded paper which is written a nursery rhyme in pencil that is also found inserted between two branches of his Vinca plant. Finally, Gustad deposits the whole amount in the bank with the help of Dinshawji. As soon as the work is done but Bilimoria wants the money back which is another risky task. Unfortunately, Bilimoria gets four years imprisonment, meanwhile, he dies of heart attack and his funeral takes place at the tower of silence.

Meanwhile, his daughter Roshan's suffering of Diarrhea worries also jolted his mind severely. Roshan's illness continues to make matters worse. So Gustad visits Dr. Paymaster to report Roshan's continuous illness but he is insulted. Because, the doctor suspects him that Gustad has modified the prescription at will so that the illness assumes an unexpected proportion. These situations contribute Gustad mind that makes him a feeling of restlessness and landing him in the darkland of suspicion.

Conclusion

Thus this paper showcases the intensive sufferings of the protagonist Gustad throughout the novel. The novel deals with the trials, frustrations, anxieties and depressions of middle-class living. The residents of Khodadad Building mostly belong to this class and their strategies for trying to survive in a respectable way are portrayed in this novel. The life of Gustad is a prime example of this. The cramped flat where there is no place to keep his books, the wall enclosing the housing complex which is used as an open air urinal, the thin watery milk they have to buy are all representative of middle-class life. Their concerns are financial, moral, social and political.

Citation

1. Mistry, Rohinton. *Such a Long Journey*. London: Faber and Faber & Penguin Books India. 1991.

