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Thematic Study of Rohinton Mistry's Novel

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Abstract

Rohinton Mistry's novels explore how ordinary people face the pressures of politics, family struggles, and social change in post-independence India. His first novel, Such a Long Journey, shows how political crises under Indira Gandhi's rule intrude into the daily lives of the Parsi community, while also revealing the fragility of family life. A Fine Balance highlights the impact of poverty, caste, and the Emergency, focusing on how survival depends on resilience and human connection. In Family Matters, Mistry turns to the challenges of old age, illness, and family responsibilities, exploring how love and duty are tested across generations. Together, these works reveal how larger historical forces shape private lives, exposing the tension between hope and despair in modern India.

Key Words: pressures of politics, Parsi community, challenges of old age, impact of poverty, caste,

Rohinton Mistry is one of the most powerful voices in Indian English fiction, known for his deep concern with the struggles of ordinary people. His novels combine history and family life, showing how politics and personal experiences are often inseparable. In Such a Long Journey (1991), Mistry presents the story of Gustad Noble, a middle-class Parsi man in Bombay, whose life is shaken by corruption, communal violence, and betrayal. The novel portrays the loss of trust in government during Indira Gandhi's era and reflects the uncertainty faced by minorities like the Parsis. In A Fine Balance (1995), Mistry broadens his canvas to include caste violence, poverty, and the Emergency, showing how survival depends on shared bonds even when dreams are destroyed. His later work, Family Matters (2002), brings the focus into the home, depicting the challenges of caring for an aging parent and the conflicts between tradition and modern values. Through these stories, Mistry gives voice to those silenced by politics, poverty, and time, while reminding readers of the fragile but enduring strength of human relationships.

Rohinton Mistry's first novel Such a Long Journey illustrates theme of political crises that how post-independence politics deeply intrudes into the daily lives of ordinary citizens, particularly

the Parsi community. The story sets against the milieu of the Indo-China war in 1962, the Indo-Pak wars in 1965 and 1971, and the Bangladesh Liberation struggle. “Such a humiliating defeat, everywhere people talking of nothing but the way Chinese had advanced, as though the Indian Army consisted of tin soldiers” (Such A Long Journey, 9).

Indira Gandhi is directly criticized for several things. She is blamed for nationalizing the banks, for supporting the idea of a separate Maharashtra state which led to violence and riots, and for starting the Shiv Sena to divide people by class. Dinshawji talks about these actions. “wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens” (39). The nationalization of banks in 1969 symbolizes the Parsis’ economic decline, stripping them of their former dominance, which characters like Gustad and Dinshawji lament. By Mrs. Gandhi’s bold decision, Dinshawji, Gustad’s friend, says to him, “Parsis were the Kings of banking in those days. Such a respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the bank” (38).

The rise of Shiv Sena exposes communal politics and anti-minority violence. When ordinary people protest against poor city services, these protests become violent, and innocent people like Tehmul are killed. Tehmul is a disabled boy who does not understand what is happening around him or the politics involved. “No future for 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” (55). Gustad calls the Shiv Sena leader a “Worshiper of Hitler and Mussolini” (73).

Sohrab expresses the frustration of modern times and young people. He says, “Our wonderful Prime Minister uses RAW like a private

police force to do all her dirty work” (93). He also says that she sends RAW agents to spy on opposition parties, create problems, and start violence so the police can step in. Sohrab strongly believes that Indira Gandhi turns democracy into a joke. He also says that she only pretends to support the poor to get more votes, but it is just a political trick.

Major Billimoria is used by Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi in her money scandals. Gustad is shocked and says, “Everyone knows there is corruption. But this much? Hard to believe” (280). Billimoria says that he follows the Prime Minister’s orders and gives out sixty lakh rupees. Later, he finds out that the money never goes to the Mukti Bahini. Instead, the Prime Minister’s office takes the money and moves it to a private account. Billimoria thinks the money might be used for her son’s car business or for elections. This shows that the government doesn’t care about the people. The leaders talk about love for the country, but they only care about themselves. Finally, the novel presents the theme of political crises in India and it exposes the failures of Indira Gandhi.

This novel highlights another theme the family crisis which show the weakness of the family unit when the families deal with political, social, and personal crises. The study says that Gustad Noble is devoted to protecting his family, but his efforts are constantly undermined by betrayal, financial insecurity, and political corruption.

Mistry writes about the problems that disturb Gustad’s family life. Gustad lives in Bombay with his wife Dilnavaz, two sons Sohrab and Darius, and daughter Roshan. They live in a Parsi housing colony called Khodadad Building. Gustad’s grandfather is rich and sells furniture. But his son, who drinks too much, wastes all the money. Gustad’s grandfather is a strong man, and the family has more than

just money—they also have good values.

Gustad loves and respects his father who loves to books and owns a bookshop. “Gustad’s relationship with his father, steeped in shared stories and familial lore, was a constant reminder of the generational continuity of Parsi values and the significance of cultural heritage” (247). But when he gets sick and goes to the hospital, Gustad’s younger brother destroys the shop. The family becomes poor, and the shop is gone. Gustad’s life is full of problems. He remembers the hard times when his family lost everything. These memories hurt him deeply.

Gustad Noble hopes his son Sohrab will bring back the lost respect and success of their family. Gustad works hard to get Sohrab into IIT, but Sohrab refuses to go and wants to study Arts instead. “It’s not suddenly. 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” (48). This causes a big fight, and Sohrab leaves home. Gustad also has problems with his younger son Darius, who falls in love with a neighbor’s daughter—Rabadi. Gustad often gets angry and struggles to understand his sons.

He worries about his daughter Roshan’s health and prays for her. His wife, Dilnavaz, tries to keep the family together and even uses help from a local healer. Gustad also feels betrayed by his old friend Major Bilimoria, who suddenly disappears and later turns out to be involved in a dangerous political scheme. Gustad is forced to hide a large amount of money for Bilimoria, which puts his family at risk. “As the political unrest swept through the city, Gustad found himself caught between the demands of the present” (221).

As things fall apart, Gustad loses trust in the government and realizes the world is full of lies and pain. His friend Dinshawji also suf-

fers from cancer and personal problems. Gustad watches everything around him that his friends, family, and beliefs go slowly break down. In the end, he understands that there is no complete safety in life, and he must accept the changes and keep protecting his family the best he can.

Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* explores how individual lives are shaped and often destroyed by larger forces of poverty, caste, politics, and fate. One of the strongest themes is poverty and survival, as seen in Dina Dalal’s struggle to maintain her independence after her husband’s death and in Ishvar and Om’s fight to earn a living after caste violence destroyed their family. “timeless chain of caste” (*A Fine Balance* 95). The novel also powerfully addresses caste oppression and social inequality: Ishvar and Om’s decision to become tailors instead of following their hereditary work as tanners results in the brutal killing of their relatives, showing how caste violence continues even in modern India. “The goondas began working their way towards the untouchable quarter. They beat up individuals at random in the streets, stripped some women, raped others, burned a few huts” (156).

The theme of politics and the Emergency highlights how the government hurts people’s personal lives. Forced sterilizations, demolitions of slums, and police violence take away human dignity and ruin the already fragile security of the poor. At the same time, the novel stresses the theme of family and replacement bonds: Even though they are different, Dina, Maneck, Ishvar, and Om live like a small family for some time. They give each other love, care, and happiness during hard times.

In the end, Mistry shows the themes of loss, fate, and weakness. All the characters lose their dreams: Dina loses her freedom, Ishvar and Om lose their respect, and Maneck kills himself because he cannot face the pain. The

title A Fine Balance means the thin line between hope and sadness. It shows that people can live only with strength, kindness, and support from each other, even when society and politics make life very hard.

The novel Family Matters deals with the struggle of the elderly with illness, dependence, and loss of dignity. Nariman Vakeel has Parkinson's disease and a broken ankle. He shows how old people who were once independent can become a burden to their family. "Now you want to torment my old age". (Family Matters, 8). Caring for him causes problems between his stepchildren, Coomy and Jal, and his daughter Roxana. It shows the worry of how old people are treated.

The novel asks what family members owe each other. Roxana takes Nariman into her busy home. It's hard for her, but she does it because she cares. Coomy thinks Nariman is a burden. She doesn't want to help him. Yezad doesn't like Nariman at first. Later, he becomes strict like a father. Mistry shows both love and pressure in family duties in an Indian home.

The conflict between old and young also emerges as a vital theme. Nariman represents an older generation of secular, humanist values, while Yezad embodies a turn toward rigidity and conservatism. The children, particularly Jehangir, symbolize continuity and the possibility of renewal. His closing words—"Yes, I'm happy"—offer a faint but significant glimmer of hope amid pervasive decline (Mistry 487). This theme highlights Mistry's concern with how values and responsibilities are passed on—or distorted across generations.

Rohinton Mistry's novels show how politics, poverty, and family struggles shape the lives of ordinary people in India. Whether it is the political corruption in Such a Long Journey, the harsh effects of caste and the Emergency

in A Fine Balance, or the problems of aging and family duty in Family Matters, Mistry reminds us that human bonds and kindness are the only sources of strength in difficult times.

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