

THE INTERSECTION OF POLITICS AND PERSONAL LIFE IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

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Abstract

This paper investigates the profound interconnection between political dynamics and personal experiences in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*. Set in the politically volatile era of early 1970s India, the novel captures the pervasive influence of Indira Gandhi's administration and the looming spectre of the Emergency on the lives of its characters. Focusing on Gustad Noble, a bank clerk whose life is upended by political intrigue and personal betrayal, the analysis delves into how Mistry weaves historical events into the fabric of everyday life. The paper examines the nuanced portrayal of Gustad's relationships, particularly with Major Jimmy Bilimoria, to illustrate the broader impacts of political corruption and state oppression on individual trust and familial bonds. Themes such as corruption, loyalty, duty, and fear are explored in depth, alongside the novel's use of symbolism and metaphor to reflect the intrusion of politics into personal domains. Through this exploration, the paper aims to elucidate Mistry's critique of the socio-political landscape of the time and its reverberations in the personal lives of his characters, demonstrating the inseparable nature of the political and the personal in shaping human experience and identity.

Key Words: Emergency, political corruption, personal betrayal, socio-political

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is a compelling narrative that captures the intricate entanglement of political events and personal lives in India during the early 1970s. Set against the backdrop of Indira Gandhi's combative administration and the ensuing political turbulence, the novel offers a poignant exploration of how national politics infiltrate and shape the daily lives of ordinary citizens. This paper examines how Mistry intertwines political and personal realms, focusing on themes of corruption, loyalty, oppression, and the personal growth of his characters. The novel is set in Bombay in 1971, a time marked by significant political upheaval in India. Indira Gandhi's government faced numerous challenges, including economic instability, political dissent, and the looming threat of the Bangladesh Liberation War. This period eventually led to the declaration of the Emergency in 1975, a time characterised by widespread political repression and human rights violations.

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Mistry meticulously incorporates these historical events into his narrative, vividly portraying their impact on individual lives. Gustad Noble, the protagonist, is a middle-class Parsi bank clerk whose life is profoundly affected by the political climate. His struggles, including his strained family relationships and financial difficulties, are exacerbated by the broader political context. Gustad's involvement with Major Jimmy Bilimoria, a former friend turned government informant, entangles him in a web of political intrigue and corruption.

Through Gustad's character, Mistry illustrates the pervasive influence of politics on personal life, highlighting the intersection of individual agency and larger socio-political forces. Major Jimmy Bilimoria represents the darker side of political involvement. Once a close friend of Gustad, Bilimoria becomes entangled in underground government operations, leading to his downfall and incarceration. His character serves as a channel for exploring themes of betrayal and the moral compromises demanded by political allegiance. Bilimoria's fate underscores the perilous intersection of personal loyalty and political duty, demonstrating how the latter can devastate personal relationships. In an emotional spurt he reacts: "to leave like this, after being neighbours for so many years, is a shameful way of behaving. Bloody bad manners" (14).

Other characters, such as Dinshawji and Tehmul, also reflect the novel's theme of political intrusion into personal life. Dinshawji, Gustad's colleague, embodies the everyday individual's disillusionment with the government, while Tehmul, a mentally challenged neighbour, symbolizes the vulnerability of marginalized individuals within the political system. The novel portrays a government rife with corruption, affecting every level of society. Gustad's reluctant participation in Bilimoria's schemes highlights the pervasive nature of political corruption and its impact on personal integrity and relationships. The betrayal Gustad feels from Bilimoria, who manipulates him under the guise of friendship, mirrors the broader betrayal of the populace by corrupt political leaders. He feels "like a brother I looked upon him. What a world of wickedness it has become" (142).

Loyalty and duty emerge as central themes, as characters navigate their personal commitments and political responsibilities. Gustad's sense of duty to his family conflicts with his entanglement in Bilimoria's political machinations. This tension reflects the broader societal struggle between personal ethics and political demands. The climate of fear and oppression fostered by the government permeates the novel. Characters live under the constant threat of political retribution, which shapes their interactions and decisions. Mistry uses this atmosphere to critique the oppressive nature of the political regime and its dehumanizing effects on individuals.

Mistry's characters undergo significant personal growth in response to their political environment. Gustad's journey, marked by his initial compliance and eventual resistance to political corruption, reflects a broader theme of self-discovery and moral fortitude. His evolving relationship with his family, particularly with his son Sohrab, illustrates the potential for personal redemption and reconciliation amidst political turmoil. Mistry employs rich symbolism and metaphors to underscore the intersection of politics and personal life. Thus, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* masterfully intertwines the political and

personal, offering a nuanced critique of the socio-political landscape of 1970s India. Through the experiences of Gustad Noble and his interactions with other characters, Mistry highlights the profound impact of political events on individual lives. The novel's exploration of themes such as corruption, loyalty, oppression, and personal growth provides a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context of the era. Ultimately, *Such a Long Journey* serves as a poignant reminder of the inseparability of the political and personal in shaping human experience and identity.

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