

as they look back on the world they had left behind. There is only despair when they look forward to life in the cold, inhospitable Canadian world. There is none of the exuberance of Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses*, or the comfortable hybridity of Rai (*The Ground Beneath her Feet*), or the insouciant indifference to nations, races and borders of his old friend and rival Ormus Cama, in Mistry's creations.

This is not to suggest that the immigrant experience need be a positive one or that hybridity always leads to a magnified vision, but that Mistry's protagonists almost always see the world in unrelieved shades of black and grey – this is true of both the short stories as well as of the novels. Again, a dark world view is not necessarily inferior to a less unhappy one, but what niggles here is that this view is being offered on behalf of a people who in spite of their falling numbers, downgraded economic and social status in post-independent India still hold on as tenaciously to a positive world view, as they hold on to their this-worldly, positive religion. Mistry's protagonists display all the ethno-religious details of *narejotes*, *behyam roy* celebrations, *agary-goings*, *kessti-weavings*, etc., but none of the positive thinking that kept this tiny community going through 1,300 odd years in an Indian sub-continental space, which has been sequentially and sometimes even simultaneously ruled by rival monarchs belonging to squabbling races, religions and even ideologies.

## 4

### *Such a Long Journey:* When Old Tracks Are Lost...

The last story in the *Firozsha Baag* collection was set in Canada but with his first novel *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry returns to Bombay and the Parsi world. Even more than the short stories this novel is diasporic discourse. Here Mistry has very overtly attempted to deconstruct and repossess his past. He was born in 1952 and left India for Canada in 1975 – so the India he has evoked is that of that period. More specifically, it is Bombay of that era that he has recreated in this novel. *Such a Long Journey* was the first novel by an Indian immigrant to Canada to win the Governor General's Award for fiction in the year of its publication – 1991.

From the vantage point of the 1990s Mistry has reviewed the remembered past, the decades of the 1960s and 70s, when the ills that beset Bombay today, first began to manifest themselves. Recalling those decades when Bombay, before she became Mumbai, began to fall from grace, Mistry has pulled out all the stops and evoked all the real and apocryphal Bombay specials, which makes this novel a quintessential Bombay book.

Another significant aspect of this text is the leitmotif of 'journeying', which is also central to most diasporic writing. The three epigraphs which preface the novel set the tone. The first is from Firdausi's Iranian epic *Shah Nama*, and recalls both the glorious Iranian heritage of a mighty empire as well as

hints at the downgraded condition of the present-day Parsis. The second is from T.S. Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* and reminds the readers of the ancient Zoroastrian religion and the belief that the magi who attended the birth of Christ were Zoroastrian priests. This epigraph also provides the title as well as the central metaphor of the novel: 'A cold coming we had of it, / Just the worse time of the year / For a journey, and such a long journey.' Finally, Tagore's lines from the *Gitanjali* sum up the way in which the Parsis have moved from one country to another and how they have had to adapt themselves to new realities.

In *Such a Long Journey* the Parsi world gradually moves out of its self-imposed isolation and interacts at the highest levels of finance and politics with the postcolonial Indian world. The catalyst is the 'factional' character of Major Jimmy Billimoria. This is a composite character fashioned out of the real-life State Bank of India cashier Sohrab Nagarwala and the Parsi agent from RAW (arm of the Indian secret service), who was close to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. The story line however is more centrally concerned with the events that had overtaken Nagarwala. He was the man involved in the Rs. 60 lakh scam that had rocked the Indira Gandhi government in 1971. He claimed that he had received a phone call from the Prime Minister instructing him to hand over that large sum of money to a messenger. This was never accepted by the Prime Minister's office and Nagarwala was charged with embezzlement and arrested. He died in rather mysterious circumstances before he could be brought to trial. The missing sum of money was also connected with the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh out of the ruins of East Pakistan.

It is against this backdrop that Gustad Noble and his family live out their lives in this book. Mistry has here provided an 'insider-outsider' view of the city at a time when it was witnessing the slow erosion of the idealism that had marked the

beginning of the end of the Nehruvian dream of a secular India. The Chinese attack of 1962 was seen as a betrayal by Nehru of the Indo-Chinese friendship that he had fostered with that country since India's independence. He never recovered from that shock of seeing his vision of Asian socialism and regional cooperation crumble.

The end of the Nehruvian utopia also marked the beginning of sordid power-policing, corruption at the highest level, nepotism and cynical manoeuvring of the electorate. In Bombay it marked the end of its famed religious tolerance. When large parts of Northern India were convulsed by Hindu-Muslim riots in the wake of the partitioning of India in 1947, Bombay had remained relatively trouble-free. This however changed in the 1960s with the rise of extreme right-wing political parties like the Shiv Sena in Bombay. The Sena raised the bogey of the other – the religious other, the Muslims, the linguistic other, especially the Tamil speakers, and the regional other, all who came to Bombay from other parts of India and who according to the Sena snatched the bread out of the mouths of the sons of the soil.

Mistry, like many other political analysts and novelists (see Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*), places the blame for this at Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India's, door: 'how much blood-shed, how much rioting she caused. And today we have the bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second class citizens. Don't forget she started it all by supporting the racist buggers' (39). The language of this denunciation of Mrs. Gandhi's politics is indigenised in the tradition of postcolonial discourse. Mistry's texts are splendid celebrations of the Parsi idiom and faithfully capture its rhythms. Unlike earlier Indian English writers, notably Nissim Ezekiel, Mistry does not use Indian English to merely create a comic effect. He uses it consistently and naturally and thereby conveys its present status as one of the several Indian languages with its own distinctive phonetic and syntactic features – a part

of the phenomenon of global 'englishes'. This is a post-colonial mode of resistance offered by other contemporary writers too – like Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Bapsi Sidhwa among many others. They use the coloniser's language not to curse with but to subvert the privileging of colonial discourse and the hegemony of the Master Narratives of the West, thereby most effectively sabotaging the unequal Prospero-Caliban dichotomy.

The text begins at the beginning, the dawn of a typical day for its chief protagonist Gustad Noble, who turns Eastwards to the rising sun to 'offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda' (1). As he prays to the Supreme God, in other flats in Khodad Building, the milkman, known commonly to Bombaywallahs as the *Bhaiya* is busy dispensing milk to the women who queue up for this diluted commodity, it being his habit to adulterate it with water. This propensity is berated by the acerbic spinster Miss Kutputia, whose name literally means 'the bickering one', recalling Mistry's own propensity for labeling, in the Dickensian tradition, rather than naming many of his characters.

The usual argument with the *Bhaiyas* give way to the daily anxiety over the limited water supply as Mistry evokes yet another perennial Bombay problem – limited water resources and an ever burgeoning population. The new day also brings to Gustad the glad news that his elder son Sohrab has been selected for admission at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology. This is the news with which he wakes up his wife Dilnavaz. As they exult over this news he recalls how nine years back he had met with an accident saving Sohrab's life – an accident that had left him with a limp. That was also the year, 1962, in which the Indo-China war had broken out and the unprepared Indian army had met with a humiliating defeat.

This is the first instance of many in the text when the personal and the political are interlarded. It was then that

Gustad had put up the blackout papers on his window panes and ventilators, that he had still not removed. The family had at first grumbled but then 'grew accustomed to living in less light' (11). The blackout papers thus become symbolic of the many hardships that families like Gustad's have to learn to live with.

Gustad's prudence was vindicated when Pakistan had subsequently attacked India in 1965 and the blackout papers had needed to go up again. Years later it was now the troubles in the then East Pakistan that caught Gustad's attention as he read out the headlines from the daily newspaper to Dilnavaz. The news item reminds him of his old neighbour Major Billimoria who had the year before suddenly disappeared from Khodad Building never to return again. It is Billimoria who provides the political context to the novel and through whom Gustad's Parsi world becomes involved with the wider Indian world.

Also introduced in this first chapter is the wall that surrounds the Khodad Building and is an important symbol that runs throughout the book. The Bombay Municipal Corporation wants to tear it down to widen the road. It is also under threat from passerbys who use it as an open-air urinal. The wall both includes and excludes. It is protective as well as reductive. It protects the Parsi minority from the ingress of the engulfing Indian world. However, it also makes this world isolationist.

In the second chapter, the reader is introduced to typical Bombay institutions, places and communities and things which make it Bombay. First, there is the Crawford Market, the wholesale and retail vegetables, fruits and meat market in South Bombay that dates back to the colonial period and has a fountain designed by the father of Rudyard Kipling, who was then the Principal of the Art School in Bombay. Gustad had been introduced to the market by his father who used to visit the market with a servant in tow and in taxis. This was in the

days before bankruptcy had claimed his business – Noble and Sons, Makers of Fine Furniture – and much else, leaving his son with a few fine pieces of furniture. Thus Gustad's visits to the Crawford market 'with his meagre wallet and worn basket lined with newspapers...' (21), were of a different level from those made by his father. Gustad did not enjoy these visits where he had to negotiate 'floors...slippery with animal ooze and vegetable waste'. Neither did he relish bargaining with the butchers armed as they were with huge cleavers and knives. With the loss of his business, Gustad's father had lost interest in the weekly expeditions to the market, and it was instead Gustad's friend Michael who had taken over. It was under Michael's tutelage that Gustad had learnt more about chickens and cuts of meat.

Michael Saldhana, the 'tall and exceedingly fair-skinned' Goan, worked for the Bombay Municipal Corporation. The Goans and their exuberant culture and cuisine being yet another feature of the cosmopolitan fabric of Bombay. Malcolm's home was a haven for the music loving Gustad. Michael played the piano and his brother the oboe. It was there that he had been taught how to eat beef. In a subversive mode Michael would say: 'Lucky for us that we are minorities in a nation of Hindus. Let them eat their pulses and grams and beans, spiced with their stinky asafoetida – what they call hing. Let them fart their lives away...we will get our protein from their sacred cow' (23).

Malcolm's family gives Mistry the opportunity to write about the introduction of Christianity to India: 'Christianity came to India over nineteen hundred years ago, when Apostle Thomas landed on the Malabar coast among the fishermen' (24). A longish piece on St. Thomas follows these introductory remarks, thereby maybe indicating a solidarity among the minorities of Bombay, in the face of the increasing hegemony of the dominant community.

This was the past though and in this chapter Gustad's trip to the market was occasioned by the need to buy a chicken for his daughter Roshan's birthday. These were the days before pre-packaged broilers hit the market and most people bought a live chicken, which was fattened for a few days and then slaughtered. In the Noble household, the soft-hearted women, Dilnawaz and Roshan and even the son Sohrab become attached to the chicken. However, on the appointed day the chicken had to be slaughtered and Gustad seeks the help of the butcher who visits his building with his wares, for this task. As they argue over payment, the chicken whizzes out of the flat, between their legs and this brings another important character – Lame Tehmul, Tehmul Langra into the story.

The physically handicapped and mentally slow man could be symbolic of the fragile, endangered, in-bred Parsi race itself. Gustad was one of the few inhabitants of Khodad Building who had any time or patience with Tehmul. Tehmul was the victim of a hip fracture that had never mended properly. His fall from a tree had not only fractured his hip but 'although he had not landed on his head, something went wrong inside due to the jolt of the accident...' (30) and 'Tehmul was never the same' (30). So now in his mid-thirties he played with children and adored Gustad Noble who had immense patience with him. Most adults did not like him though, especially women, as he 'scratched perpetually like one possessed, mainly his groin and armpits' (31). Tehmul's manner of speaking also irritated most people as he ran his words together in breakneck speed.

There was also a rather sinister side to the child-like Tehmul. He was the unofficial rat-catcher in the building and most people got him to dispose off the rats they had caught in traps in their flats. Tehmul took the rats home and drowned them in a bucket or poured hot water over them. When this was discovered he stopped getting rats from most of his neighbours.

The following chapter brings in yet another eccentric and odd character – Dinshawji. He worked at the bank with Gustad and in him we have the kind of humorous Parsi character, we had first found in Mistry's short stories. It is Dinshawji who is also used as a mouthpiece to indict Mrs. Indira Gandhi for the corruption of Indian politics. In highly colourful and scatological language he critiques the newly powerful right wing parties and their attacks on the religious and ethnic minorities.

This happens at the dinner party for Roshan's birthday, where the contentious, runaway chicken is finally cooked and served up. Apart from politics, the party becomes an occasion where Gustad sings a song and then the chicken is served, 'with a vegetable stew' and 'fragrant basmati rice' (45). Just as they are about to start on the chicken the flat is plunged in darkness and then an argument begins between Gustad and his elder son Sohrab about the latter's future. Gustad wants him to join the prestigious IIT, Indian Institute of Technology, but Sohrab says 'IIT does not interest me... I told you I am going to change to the arts programme.' (48). Dinshawji plays the clown to save the situation and insists that somebody pull at the wishbone from the chicken with him. Finally, 'Gustad took hold of one end. They pulled and wrenched and fumbled with the greasy bone till it snapped Gustad's was the shorter piece' (49). This can be seen as an omen for the rather dangerous events that soon overtake Gustad's life.

As the story progresses the fissures between Gustad and his son Sohrab widen and the son becomes more and more rebellious. He again rejects the future his father had so lovingly and proudly mapped out for him – a degree from the Indian Institute of Technology and a successful career as a technocrat. Such a career path would ultimately lead to immigration to a Western country and a prosperous life.

Major Billimoria is re-introduced in the text at this juncture through a rather mysterious letter he has written to Gustad.

The letter has requested Gustad to collect a parcel on his behalf. As he ruminates over the letter, Gustad wonders: 'What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics...' (55). Worries over his son's future brings back past memories of the day when Gustad had saved Sohrab's life at the cost of a fractured hip and a lingering limp. Re-living the incident also reveals to the reader the more endearing side to life in Bombay. If it was a surly BEST bus conductor who was the cause of their jumping out of the bus in the middle of a lot of traffic, it was a kind-hearted taxi-driver who had come to Gustad's rescue and bundled out the passengers in his taxi, to take Gustad to a hospital. Gustad had preferred to go home and it had been Major Billimoria who had helped him out of the taxi and taken him to Madhiwalla Bonesetter. The traditional alternative medicine had healed Gustad – apart from the slight limp – while the western operation had maimed Tehmul for life. Here we have Mistry lauding the older ways of living and healing from his distant diasporic location. Is this an act of nostalgia?

Gustad writes back to the major agreeing to do help him but Dilnavaz is afraid this would lead them in some trouble. The letter being dispatched his life returns to its even tenor – enlivened only by Miss Karpitina's black magic. In an attempt to make Sohrab more amenable to his father's dream for him, Miss Karpitina offers to help. She says to Dilnavaz: 'Your eldest, he reminds me so much of my Farad' (62). The death of Farad, who was her nephew, could have been the reason for Miss Karpitina's subsequent retreat into isolation and eccentricity. Dilnavaz accepts her help in bringing about a reunion between her husband and her son, which involves at the beginning the rather innocuous lime and chillies and then a more dangerous magic potion. The potion has to be imbibed by someone, who would then take upon himself/herself Sohrab's ills. Poor Tehmul is the sacrificial victim selected by the desperate mother to cure her son.

Chapter three is also replete with the usual round of sexist and even racist jokes favoured by Dinshawji, that spice his days at the bank where Gustad and he worked. It is ironic that though Dinshawji deplored the fascist trends of right wing political parties, he himself cracked jokes at the expense of Madrasis and Gujaratis and mimicked their accents. Yet he is most concerned about the postcolonial tendency to rename roads and even cities. He chides Gustad when the latter thinks that this is an innocuous activity and should not be challenged. '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' (74). As David Williams has put it, 'what Dinshawji laments in the loss of old names is the loss of the old logocentric security, that metaphysical reassurance via language' (217) of the meaning of the self.

In addition to his broad humour about the linguistic others, Dinshawji also cracked jokes in Gujarati at the expense of the Christian typist - Laurie Coutinho - in the office. This woman is the butt of Dinshawji's lewd jokes and as she does not understand Gujarati, she continues smiling at him as he insults her. Later however, in this as in much else, nemesis catches up with Dinshawji and she complains to Gustad that she now knows what was being said to her and is very hurt and offended by it. By then Gustadji is a dying man and he contritely gives up teasing Laurie and Gustad feels sorry for his much-reduced friend.

As for the wider world - the problems within East Pakistan impinge once again on Gustad's family when his little daughter, Roshan, contributes a rupee to a raffle, proceeds of which would help the refugee children from there. Roshan wins the first prize in this raffle, a big doll, which becomes an important

image in the text. The doll with its blue eyes and bridal finery becomes an obsession with Lame Tehmul who in his mid-thirties has a man's body, with a man's longings, but a child's mind. More politically the troubles in East Pakistan feature again when Major Billimoria once again writes to Gustad, this time asking him to go to a particular stall in Chor Bazar (the old thieves' market in Bombay), which would have displayed the *Complete Works of Shakespeare* and collect the parcel the stall owner would give him. He should then take it home and follow the instructions given in the note inside. The location from where the parcel had to be picked up enables Mistry to bring in yet another Bombay institution the Chor Bazar and also allows Gustad to dwell nostalgically on his earlier visits to that colourful market. The stall owner Ghulam Mohommmed turns out to be the taxi driver who had intervened when Gustad had had the accident trying to save his son. He now hints that he is much more than a taxi-driver, in fact a sort of undercover agent who worked with Major Billimoria, who himself was part of RAW, an acronym for the Research and Analysis Wing of the Indian Secret Service. The contact address that Ghulam Mohommmed gives Gustad is located in the notorious prostitutes' quarter of Bombay where women are displayed like so many cuts of choice meat, in tiny barred rooms which look like cages, thereby giving Mistry yet another opportunity to write about yet another aspect of Bombay - its Red Light area. Gustad knew that area well as their family physician, Dr. Paymaster had his clinic there.

This reference to the doctor links the tale to the illness that now grips his daughter Roshan. It starts innocuously enough with diarrhoea, but then turns serious. Concurrently, with the illness come more parcels from Major Billimoria, which he wants his friend to keep for him. They come accompanied by books - the first was Shakespeare and the second was Plato. The second parcel had also contained a huge number of currency notes wrapped in brown paper. Gustad was shocked

by such a large sum of money and even more worried that Tehmul had been the unwitting witness to the unwrapping of this money and '...with a roar, he slammed shut the window, cutting off from Tehmul's vision the sight that had made his eyes shine as they had on the day he saw the naked doll' (117). A letter from Billimoria reassures Gustad that this was not black market money but government money and he was to open an account in his bank and deposit it there in the name of Mira Obili (an anagram for Billimoria as pointed out by Sohrab) and the address was to be either Gustad's own or his post office box number in Delhi. Gustad and Dilnavaz decide that when he had agreed to help Billimoria he hadn't known what a risk he would have to take and that he would have to deal with such large sums of money. It would be too dangerous for Gustad to deposit this huge amount of money in his own account or in any other. So they decide to hide the money in the house till such a time when Gustad could hand it back to Billimoria's contact in Bombay, Ghulam Mohammed. The latter however, is out of the city and cannot be contacted – so the money remains with the Nobles. In the meantime refugees from the troubled East Pakistan continue to pour into India and some even find their way to Bombay. Gustad wonders how long a poor country like India could afford to feed millions of more people.

Gustad's work for his old friend takes place against the ominous backdrop of the breaking of the Bombay monsoon, yet another Bombay familiar that Mistry would definitely have recalled with nostalgia or irritation (for the inconveniences it causes in flooded roads) in Canada. For Gustad the rains also bring back the old pain in his broken hip, the result of the old accident. This provides Mistry with the opportunity of evoking yet another old Bombay institution, the traditional bone setter Dr. Madhiwala. The skills of Madhiwala and now his descendants are fervently sworn to by generations of Bombayites, Parsi and non-Parsi. In his invocation of all things

Bombay Mistry does not spare even the ubiquitous crows, who are pictured wet and half-scurtling and half-flapping across his pages (133). The occasion for this flapping being the discovery of a dead bandicoot in Gustad's medicinal plant the *vinca* – *subho* in Gujarati. The building Gurdka is summoned to deal with this nuisance and apprehend the culprit. The Gurdka of course is/was yet another Bombay speciality – the tough Nepali ex-serviceman who would eke out his army pension by working as a watch man for residential complexes in Bombay. The bravery of the Gurdka soldier in war and his legendary loyalty made him an ideal watchdog in an increasingly crime ridden city. However, this once the Gurdka was not of much use to Khodad Building: The decapitated rat is followed by a similarly treated cat and Inspector Bamji the police officer who also lived in the building looked at the cat and said to Gustad, 'somebody's knife is very sharp. A very skilful knife. Anybody has a grudge against you, wants to harass you?' (138).

Soon it becomes clear that the dead animals are a warning and are connected with the huge amounts of money collected on behalf of Billimoria and not yet deposited into the bank as instructed by him. It is now clear that the note that followed the dead animals into the *vinca* bush meant that they had to get rid of the money. So Gustad decides to deposit it little by little so that nobody would get suspicious. However, this threat to him and his family leaves him feeling very betrayed and bitter. He feels let down by his friend for exposing him to such danger, '...like a brother I looked upon him. What a world of wickedness it has become' (142).

In the wider world outside the Khodad Building compound too the clouds of war and danger gather as India begins to prepare itself for defence against a possible attack from Pakistan. It is then that Gustad on his way to his bank, comes across the pavement artist who draws pictures of gods and saints. In a world in which corruption and its stench was

widespread there was the artist whose pictures momentarily arrested the world and made it pay obeisance to the portraits.

In his moment of trouble Gustad turns to Dinshawji for help and confides in him the story of Billimoria, his letters and the money. Gustad emphasises how helping Billimoria would contribute to helping the national effort against Pakistan. With Dinshawji's help the money in the alcove at Gustad's home slowly depletes and finds its way bit by bit into the bank account. By that time Dinshawji's health is in a rather precarious condition and Gustad feels guilty about compromising his sick friend 'who was now willing to break banking laws and jeopardize (ing) his job and pension this close to retirement' (144). This slow process is accompanied by other family problems. As noted earlier, with the help of Miss Kutpitia's little spells Dilnavaz was trying to effect a reconciliation between her husband and son Sohrab. However, this meant transferring the onus of that trouble onto the unsuspecting Lame Tehmul who had been selected to drink the glass of lime juice over which the spell had been laid. So while Gustad in a sense duped Dinshawji, Dilnavaz was doing something even worse to Tehmul - who fortunately for him seemed resistant to spells and drank the daily glass with 'a burp and a grin' (147) and returned it with the usual thanks murmured in his superfast style. To add to Dilnavaz's troubles her little daughter Roshan now becomes really ill and once again Miss Kutpitia intones that it was the evil eye and that 'doctor's medicine is no prevention or cure for that' (149). So Dilnavaz takes recourse to some more spells to help her daughter. This time though they merely involved the hanging of a bunch of dried chillies and lime over her door and did not include making anyone swallow glasses of spell ridden liquids.

The domestic world of Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia is far removed from the world of Gustad Noble. Gustad's world was

interlinked through the Major with the world of big-time finance and murky military-industrial-capitalism. *Such a Long Journey* is obviously a novel written from a male point of view. The female characters are the passive recipients of the actions undertaken by their male counterparts. Dilnavaz, her daughter Roshan and Miss Kutpitia are female stereotypes. Dilnavaz is the perfect foil to Gustad. She is soft and pretty, while he is big and muscular. As a couple they exhibit the typical features of male aggressiveness and female passivity. As Kate Millet has noted: 'If aggressiveness is the trait of the master class, docility must be the corresponding trait of a subject group'.

The child Roshan too is a doll-like creature, sickly and fragile. She is in direct contrast to the sons Sohrab and Darius. As is the wont of such female children, she cries, gets scared and is petted and cosseted by Daddy.

Miss Kutpitia, is the archetypal spinster, much reviled in the neighbourhood. She is the 'ubiquitous witch of fairy stories come to life', Mistry informs us. Miss Kutpitia could have been a strong character, privy to ancient wisdom of women, living a life of independence. However, all we get is a caricature of a silly, superstitious woman. Miss Kutpitia's spells and magic, her being a 'witch' is not at all in a positive feminist sense.

Instead her magic spells are reduced to being a mere manifestation of women's irrational nature. Mistry appears to be poking fun at this female behaviour. Miss Kutpitia, being a spinster and a little batty is to be allowed her superstitions. However, Dilnavaz, the happily-married woman, and 'fulfilled' mother is critiqued for her belief in the spinster's spells. This critique is not too serious as the reader is told that it is only because Dilnavaz is so concerned for her husband and children that she succumbs to Miss Kutpitia's '*jade-mantar*' nonsense. Whenever Dilnavaz is not busy cooking or filling water, she is seen conspiring with Miss Kutpitia in creating spells for her family's well-being. Sohrab's intractability is sought to be



removed by a spell involving a lizard's tail. Limes and chillies as noted earlier and even poor Tehmul are pressed into service to cure Roshan's illness.

Gustad the rational male is never party to this and his mind is occupied with important matters of national importance. Dilnavaz's universe is restricted to the world of her home. Mistry does not probe beneath the surface of the reductive lives of Dilnavaz and Miss Kutchipia. He does not seek the reasons for their beliefs in spells and instead has exploited them for comic relief. The pathos underlying the lonely life of Miss Kutchipia, or Dilnavaz's never-ending household drudgery are not explored. Indeed all the pathos and sympathy in the book are reserved for the eponymously named Gustad as he nobly strives for the welfare of his family. There is sympathy even for the retarded Tehmul as he tries to copulate with Roshan's doll but none for Miss Kutchipia. Her stridency and apparently unbalanced behaviour could have been the result of repressed sexuality too. Mistry does not appear to be interested in female sexuality. Dilnavaz interacts with her husband in a romantic manner rather than in a sensual way. Miss Kutchipia is celibate in the cause of her departed nephew, like Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, was in the bitter memory of having been abandoned on her wedding day. Little Roshan too is amazingly innocent and is not the least curious about her body.

In a novel entitled *Such a Long Journey*, the female characters in it do not journey at all. They remain stationary while the world around them moves and changes. There is a static universe where they are denied knowledge of even their own stultification and repression by their creator. This text which is a fictional account of recent Indian history is in the genre of what Greene and Kahn have called history as 'written by men, from a male perspective. What has been designated historically significant has been deemed according to a valuation of power and activity in the public world'.

It is to this deemed important world of history and rationality that the text returns when Miss Kutchipia's spells fail and Roshan does not get any better. Gustad has to then take her to Dr. Paymaster, the family physician, who has his clinic in the Prostitute's quarter, giving Mistry yet another opportunity to walk down nostalgia lane and even bring in a bit of squalid erotica in the form of the *Parwalla* – the betelnut seller – there who specialised in selling aphrodisiac *pasans* to the men who went to the prostitutes. The doctor's medicines do not help Roshan who continues being very ill and to add to Gustad's troubles the female stenographer with whom Dinshawji flirted and made lewd jokes in Gujarati, finally realises what he was saying and complains to Gustad. When Gustad tells Dinshawji to lay off her he 'changed utterly...suddenly fragile and spent.' (180). The only bright spot in all these dark event is the commissioning of the pavement artist by Gustad to cover his building wall with religious portraits, so that it would stop people from using it as an open air urinal.

So, the Wall of all Religions comes into existence and re-affirms Bombay's famed tolerance in the face of increased fundamentalism and violence: 'Over the next few days, the wall filled up with gods, prophets and saints. When Gustad checked the air each morning and evening, he found it free of maledour' (183). Here however recurs the metaphor of journeying and the artist begins to have misgivings about the wall and becomes restless: For him the wall becomes a bind, and he longs to get away, 'the journey – chanced, unplanned and solitary – was the thing to relish' (184). As he ponders his next move his creations, 'Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Our Lady of Fatima, Zarathustra and numerous others.' (184) awaited their uncertain futures – uncertain being the key word for Bombay's minorities, religious and linguistic in a city in the clutches of a political and criminal mafia.

Now the political and personal both start coming to a head in Gustad's life as Roshan's illness becomes graver and Dinshawji brings the news of Major Billimoria's dismissal from RAW on charges of corruption. Here in a postmodernist mode Mistry juxtaposes facts with fiction and the newspaper report on Billimoria's dismissal is lifted almost verbatim, with just a change of names, from the reports in the press about the dismissal of the real life State Bank Cashier, Nagarwalla (194-195). Both Gustad and Dinshawji are now frightened about the money they have been depositing in their bank on Billimoria's behalf. Gustad begins looking for Ghulam Mohammed once more and finds him ultimately in a hideout in the Prostitute's Quarter. Mohammed tells him that the Major's life is in danger and wants Gustad to withdraw all the money he has deposited and send it back to Billimoria. Gustad has thirty days to withdraw the money and return the package to Mohammed. The visit also yields a surprise in the form of Lame Themul who is heard beseeching a prostitute to pleasure him, even as she moves away repelled by his physical and mental disabilities. Gustad leaves with the warning, 'If the money is not delivered on time, things will go badly for all of us' (205) ringing in his ears.

So, the dangerous withdrawals begin and halfway through the deadline Mohammed leaves a reminder for Gustad in the form of the uprooted Vinca plant. The tension proves too much for Dinshawji whose illness now necessitates a removal to hospital. The Wall of all Religions however seems to flourish amidst all these problems and the artist having overcome his wanderlust and uncertainties finally settles down to re-painting his gods and goddesses in oils and enamels instead of the usual ephemeral crayons.

The entire sum of money is finally returned to Mohammed who then entreats Gustad to go to Delhi to see Billimoria who is being victimised by the authorities. A letter from Billimoria carries a similar request and Gustad leaves with a promise to

think it over. In the meantime the Goan friend Malcolm is once again introduced into the narrative, this time to facilitate Mistry's description of the holy shrine of Mount Mary's, which Gustad visits in his company. So one by one, all the Bombay landmarks are covered by the narrative, even as Dinshawji finally dies in the hospital and Roshan's health shows no signs of improvement. Dinshawji's death brings in the unique death rites practiced by the Parsis – the consigning of the corpse to the Towers of Silence where it is devoured by scavenging birds such as the vultures. Mistry expends several pages over these death rites in his 'Last Witness' manner.

News from Mohammed once again indicates that Billimoria has been sentenced and is very anxious to see Gustad. So Gustad finally makes the trip to Delhi. Mistry now has the chance to describe the fabled Indian train journey – the fight over seats, the food packets, the toilets. The journey also enables Gustad to ponder over whether, 'would this long journey be worth it? Was any journey worth the trouble?' (259). This question being more rhetorical than demanding of an answer as the entire narrative hinges on the importance of journeying, real and metaphorical.

Gustad's meeting with Billimoria reveals Mrs. Gandhi's sordid involvement in corruption at the highest levels in the Indian government and the manner in which she used men like Billimoria to further her own political ends (270-72). Even as Gustad leaves his troubled friend the war with Pakistan finally breaks out and he returns to Bombay. Here before going home he has an encounter with the pavement artist but the discussion is cut short when Gustad realises that a fire engine has turned into the Khodad Building compound. In quest of better health for little Roshan, Dilnavaz and Miss Kutipita have continued to invoke spells and the burning of things has finally resulted in a little fire that is fortunately put out easily. Greater fires however rage as the war with Pakistan continue and blackout

papers go up all over Bombay and Gustad and his younger son Darius repair their old blackout papers – Sohrab by this time having left home after an altercation with his father – so that not a chink of light escapes them. On one such blacked out night Gustad catches Tehmul masturbating in his flat with Roshan's doll, who had continued to fascinate him. This solves the puzzle of the missing doll for Gustad who is repulsed and at the same time sorry for Tehmul. Gustad lets him keep the doll, 'Somehow the loss to Roshan would not be as great as it would be to Tehmul' (309).

The war finally ends in victory for India and wipes out the 'rankling memories of ignominious defeat at Chinese hands nine year's ago, and 1965's embarrassing stalemate with the death in Tashkent of Shastri...' (310). In the midst of all this euphoria the small newspaper item regarding Billimoria's death in Delhi catches Gustad's eye and he tears out the page and 'folds it small to fit his pocket' (311). In a mysterious manner Billimoria's body is brought to Bombay for a funeral at the Towers of Silence and Gustad decides to attend the funeral to find out who had organised it. He fails in this mission but Mistry uses this second funeral to write with black humour on the vultures who eat Parsi corpses and the debate in the community between what he calls 'the vulturists' and the opposing group who objected to such disposal methods of the dead. 'The orthodox defence was the age-old wisdom that it was a pure method, defiling none of God's good creations: earth, water, air and fire... But the reformists, who favoured cremation, insisted that the way of the ancients was unsuitable for the twentieth century. Such a ghoulish system, they said, ill became a community with a progressive reputation and a forward-thinking attitude' (317).

The novel now draws to an end with the ironical touch of Gustad's friend Malcolm in his official capacity as a Municipal Corporation employee entrusted with the task of demolishing

Gustad's wall of all religions, in order to widen the road outside. The name of the building around which the wall stands fails to immediately strike Malcolm as the one in which Gustad lives. Instead he muses on the slow erosion of beautiful music from Bombay. As a Goan – usually rather westernised – and one who is steeped in Western music, he mourns the near death of such music in Bombay and is thankful that Western cultural institutions such as the British Council and the Max Mueller Bhavan and the home-grown Time and Talents Club still keep it going. This section reveals Mistry's own limitations vis-a-vis music of the Indian type which is well and alive in the city of Bombay. Such a definition of 'culture' could also be called an instance of a colonial mind set that has survived the end of empire.

As Malcolm and his demolition crew drive towards Khodad Building, Gustad's estranged son Sohrab pays his customary visit to his mother in his father's absence. Gustad on the way back home from Billimoria's funeral realises that it was Ghulam Mohammed who had organised the funeral. Mohommed had reverted to being a taxi driver his old cover as a RAW agent. In spite of the way in which Billimoria had been treated, Mohommed carries on in RAW as it was 'Still, much safer for me to be inside RAW than outside' (322) also he felt that would provide him with an opportunity to get even with those who had destroyed Billimoria, whom he called 'Bili Boy'.

Malcolm having reached Khodad Building at last realises that it was where Gustad lived. The first person to know what was to happen to the wall is the pavement artist, who crumples and is unable to even summon 'a trace of the resources that had fuelled his wanderings in the old days' (324). In the meantime a procession protesting against the highhanded behaviour of the Municipal Corporation enters the street. Mistry can now conclude on the high note of yet another Bombay special – the ubiquitous *morcha*. Reaching the wall of all religions the *morcha* halts briefly to pay its obeisance to the multitude of

gods and when they are told that the wall was about to be demolished to widen the road the *morecha's* mood becomes ugly and 'it howled, the tempest raged and threatened' (327). Gustad's return coincides with this moment and his friend Malcolm appeals to him for help but it is some time before Gustad realises what is happening and finds that the *morecha* consists of old friends like Dr. Paymaster, the Panwallah outside his clinic - he of the aphrodisiac paan fame and even prostitutes. The *morecha* was on its way to the Municipal office to protest against what it considered unfair practices in the prostitute's locality, when it halts before the wall of all religions.

The small contingent of policemen accompanying the *morecha* led by Inspector Bamji, wait to see what would happen and soon big stones begin to fly and one lands on the head of Tehmul who has been an avid spectator so far. Dr. Paymaster now abandons his role in the *morecha* and becomes a doctor again. An ambulance is summoned to take Tehmul to the hospital as he has suffered severe blood loss. But before this could happen Tehmul dies and a disheartened Dr. Paymaster is helped to his feet by the visiting Sohrab. The hearse is now called to take Tehmul to the Towers of Silence instead, but since this would take some time and as Miss Kurpitia says it 'does not look right, the *wreasan* lying like this near the gate' (334), Inspector Bamji suggests that since Tehmul was too heavy to be carried up to his own flat, he should be shifted under the shade of a tree at least. Gustad overcome with grief for the poor dead man, hefts him up in his arms and 'without a trace of a limp, without a fumble' (335) carries Tehmul up the stairs to his flat and kicks the door shut behind him. In the few moments of privacy he has, he lays him on the bed, covers up the naked doll lying there and puts a cap on Tehmul's head and softly intones the Zoroastrian prayers as tears run down his face. When Sohrab comes looking for him he hugs his son tightly - having lost poor Tehmul, Sohrab becomes too precious to be ignored any more.

The *wreasan* now being decently laid in its own bed and the *morecha* having prudently melted away, Malcolm instructs his men to begin the demolition of the wall. The artist too is resigned to the destruction of his work of art and decides that it is time to journey once again. In reply to Gustad's question as to where he would go, he says: 'In a world where roadsides become temples and shrines and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where?' (338).

The artist begins his journey once again, accompanied only by his satchel in which he has his box of crayons - the fancy oils and enamels being abandoned - and Gustad turns back to his own flat. Once inside he stands upon a chair and pulls off the blackout papers covering his ventilators.

The novel thus ends on the dual note of journeying and staying rooted - Gustad having chosen to stay. However, even this staying back has changed as it now is in the context of Gustad having pulled down the blackout papers and letting in light, allowing the moths of the past to fly out of his life. At another level this could also signal the letting in of the wider Indian reality into the enclosed Parsi space. It could mean that the wall having gone and the old tracks thus being lost, as the epitaph to the novel from Tagore's *Gitanjali* had said, 'a new country is revealed with its wonders'. In Mistry's own words: 'Life itself is... a journey without destination. Sort of like a wall that goes on and on with pictures' (Interview with Ali Lakhani).