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**ALIENATION IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S NOVEL SUCH
A LONG JOURNEY**

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ABSTRACT

Alienation means separation or rejection of human beings by dominating society. In literature, alienation is often characterized as the process of social or class tensions among different social groups where humans' awareness of their difference may distance or isolate others from being united or involved with them. Alienation is a common theme in the major works of Rohinton Mistry. The issue of alienation in immigration stories in Mistry's novel Such a Long Journey not only appeals to the immigrants of Parsi community, but also to other immigrants from different communities all over the world. Mistry's primary novel, Such a Long Journey (1991), creates a vibrant picture of Indian family life and culture and tells a story rich in subject matter, characterization and symbolism. Mistry's depiction of the novel Such a Long Journey exemplifies the tenuous nature of individual narrative agency over personal and urban identity as well as both the alienating and the restorative consequences of communal politics. Rohinton Mistry tries to focus perspectives of multiculturalism through human life sufferings, anxieties, alienation, and insecurity in the novel. He also points out that human loneliness, alienation and personal pain that arises out of male-female relationship and personal conflicts with social organizations in this award winning novel.

*The following abbreviations are used after quotations:
SLJ - Such a Long Journey.*

VJLL - Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature.

KEYWORDS: *human loneliness, Rohinton Mistry, primary novel, attribute film*

Alienation in Rohinton Mistry's "Such a Long Journey"

Such a Long Journey is a fascinating book with the ability to hold the reader spellbound. The first novel of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* wins both the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and the Governor General's Award, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. It was made into an attribute film in 1998.

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*'s title is taken from T.S. Eliot's poem *Journey of the Magi* which provides one of the three epigraphs to the novel (VJLL).

A cold coming we had of it, just the worst time of the year for a journey and such a long journey. Eliot's poem is extremely emblematic. The journey of the three wise men who want to visit the birthplace of Jesus Christ undertakes a hazardous journey and overcome many problems and difficulties in life. Similarly, this novel is also symbolic representing the long journey of the Gustard Noble who overcomes many ups and downs in his life.

Such a Long Journey is written in the third person as a story of current events. The narrator is conscious of the character's minds. Flashbacks to the protagonist's youth are visited. The character's discussions are utilized to discuss events then current in the Indian subcontinent.

The novel of Rohinton Mistry portrays the spirit of the cultural identity in the feeling of rootlessness, helplessness and alienation felt by the Parsi community. The Parsis face economic losses, lowered social status and personal suffering. This is evident in his all novels. In *Such a Long Journey*, the protagonist Gustard Noble faces many trials in his life. His dreams regarding Sohrab, his eldest son are shattered when he declines to join the prestigious IIT despite clearing the entrance examination. Not only this he also rebels against his father and leaves his home to try his luck in music. In utter desperation he states, "Throwing away his fortune without reason. What have I not done for him, tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life, and got to suffer all my life (slapping his hip)." (SLJ52)

Such a Long Journey is set against the backdrop of the Bangladesh—Pakistan wars of the 1970s. In this novel, public events reflect direct repercussions on the life of the ordinary citizen. Since the wars are a narrative excuse for the exploration of both political ethics and the problems of individual ethical-moral responsibility, an explanatory note on the historical events is in order.

Parsi communities are shaken by the rise of Shiv Sena in Bombay, the party promises to give jobs for the middle-class people. The party is against the South Indian immigrants, typically immigrants from Tamil Nadu especially the job seekers. The party Shiv Sena in the novel is despised by the Parsi people as the supporters of the Shiv Sena ill-treated the individuals of the Parsi community as a "Parsi

crow-eaters". Furthermore, offending the community's funeral cremations, Dinshawji and Gustad are frightened that the Parsis might become "second-class citizens" in the future.

Politics forms an important subtext to the main action of all three novels of Rohinton Mistry. This preoccupation moves increasingly closer to contemporary times as Mistry tackles. In *Such a Long Journey*, the Bangladeshi war with Pakistan, "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". (SLJ 7)

Such a Long Journey explores the loss of material belongings as well as the loss of death or separation. First, material loss in Gustad's life is his family's misery during his father's bankruptcy. He also endures with the loss of deaths of his friends Jimmy, Dinshawji, and Tehmul. However, Gustad suffered from feeling of alienation, isolation, confusion, poverty and many more.

Gustard Noble is the protagonist of the novel who is quite content with this situation. Gustard Noble faces with his family's impoverishment in the course of his father's bankruptcy. However, he also gets cope with the death of his friends Jimmy, Dinshawji and Tehmul. Moreover, loss of Gustad also entails a feeling of alienation and dissatisfaction with the present. The semantics of loss implies a dispossession against the subjects will the result of which can be poverty, isolation, confusion, disillusionment, disillumination. It is clear through the following detail the causes and effects of loss making its impact on the protagonist of the novel. The past is of special relevance to Gustad in the novel. Two events are significant in this context. They are Gustad's father's bankruptcy and a childhood experience at Matheran involving a broken bowl. Gustad associates with "sensual qualities with the memory of his father's bankruptcy. The destructive character of this event is not merely conveyed by sound and touch however." (SLJ 182)

On the other hand, there is great love and compassion in Gustad who shows this at different other parts in the novel. There is a great rally underway and Dr. Paymaster is at the helm of affairs. In brief, Mistry's novels show social realism. *Such a Long Journey* also presents truly exemplary characters who provoke our laughter and sympathy, but who like the protagonist will remain in the minds and hearts of readers for a long time to come because the writer succeeds in making us 'see' and having done so, makes us respond accordingly.

Thus, it is found that Gustad, a man with principles and dreams and aspirations, realizes that some compromise is to be reached in life. He emerges out of his problems, a survivor with tremendous resilience. As a realist novel, Mistry brings out the reality of life – the novel becomes a telling commentary on social life, political life and morality. His focus is on the Parsi community and

their problems in life. There is a focus on life in Bombay in the early 1970s – a city in transition with the backdrop of the war. He captures the essence of Bombay – the good, the bad and the worse, dwelling upon the cosmopolitanness, certain landmarks whether of universal interest or religious interest – Crawford Market, the Irani restaurants, the dudhwalla ‘bhaiya,’ the water problems of people in the city, the red-light areas etc. He uses typical terms – native of the language adopted by the Parsis - which is Gujarati and refers to the Parsi customs, food, religious ceremonies all of which contribute to Mistry’s realism. Nilufer Bharucha says, “The wall both includes and excludes. It is protective as well as reductive. It protects the Parsee community from the ingress of the engulfing Indian world. However, it also makes this world isolationist”. (SLJ 123)

Through his myriad characters, Mistry also shows the awareness of differences among human beings. He locates innate goodness, which is, at times, gets diluted or distorted by compelling circumstances, because human beings are not mythical gods. They do err, so Gustad forgives Bilimoria. When Gustad pitted against his son, he recognizes his own mistake and so forgives his son Sohrab. Gustad fears that there is no life and occupation for the minorities in Bombay mainly due to unlawful government. Dinshawji reminds the good old days of the Parsis, “What fun we used to have parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks”. (SLJ 38)

The pain of alienation and the severe Identity Crisis one faces due to immigration to distant lands is expressed best by the writers of the Diaspora. Amongst all the writers who can be categorized as Diaspora writers, Rohinton Mistry is the one writer who creates a distinct name for himself because of his brilliance as a writer and also because of his unique craftsmanship of honest portrayal of the subaltern through his short stories and novels. *Such a Long Journey* portrays geographical location where regionalism and parochial sentiments run very high. Due to the manipulation of political and administrative institutions and the public opinion for narrow selfish political ambitions by certain individuals. It symbolizes by Indira Gandhi at the national level and Shiv Sena at the local level. Being a Parsi and then an immigrant in Canada, Rohinton Mistry sees himself as symbol of double displacement.

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