

COMMUNITY OTHERNESS IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S „SUCH A LONG JOURNEY” (1991)

Adina Campu

Lecturer, PhD, "Transilvania" University of Braşov

Abstract: “Such a Long Journey” (1991) is Rohinton Mistry’s first published novel, a fascinating and complex book, a deserving winner of several prizes such as: the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, the Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award and an entry on the shortlist for the Booker Prize. The novel is based in Bombay, India, in the year 1971, its main focus being the lives and hardships of members of the Parsi community intermingled with the social and political realities of the time. The protagonist, bank clerk Gustad Noble, is a devoted family man struggling to keep his wife Dilnavaz and their three children, Sohrab, Darius and Roshan out of poverty. Rohinton Mistry’s work is concerned with Otherness but it is always a community Otherness that he brings to the fore in his writings. Obviously, the community that he deals with in all of his novels and especially this one is his own, that is the Parsi community. He has taken the role of representative and spokesperson for the community that he so much cherishes. In order to demonstrate this I focus on his treatment of history, religion and language. I argue that history is one of the most important factors which give the community a sense of uniqueness. Just like history, religion is also foregrounded here as an important marker of cultural identity. He is sensitive to the anxieties of his community and recognizes the significance of religion and ritual in the construction of human identity. Mistry uses religion, ritual and the responses to these, as central themes in his fiction. Mistry’s fiction can be interpreted as the predicament of individuals who try to cope with the contradictions of the past and the present, community and self, family and community. Each of these contexts of individual contradictions and dilemmas is an emotionally charged event in his work. I also attempt to demonstrate that “Such a Long Journey” displays a persistent concern with issues of language, more exactly with the slippery character of language and misrepresentation of reality which can often be very different from appearance.

Keywords: Otherness, community, history, religion, language.

Introduction

“Such a Long Journey” is Rohinton Mistry’s first published novel, a fascinating and complex book, a deserving winner of several prizes: the Governor General’s award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, the Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award and an entry on the shortlist for the Booker Prize.

The novel is based in Bombay, India in the year 1971 its main focus being the lives and hardships of members of the Parsi community intermingled with the social and political realities of the time. The protagonist, Gustad Noble is a devoted family man “*swimming in the tidewater of his fifth decade of life*” (Mistry, “Such a Long Journey” 1). He is a hard-working bank clerk struggling to keep his wife Dilnavaz and his three children, Sohrab, Darius and Roshan, out of poverty.

Parsi History

Rohinton Mistry’s work is concerned with Otherness but it is always a community Otherness that he brings to the fore in his writings. Obviously the community that he deals with in all his novels and especially this one is his own, that is the Parsi community. He has taken the role of representative and spokesperson for the community that he so much cherishes. History is one of the most important factors which give the community a sense of

uniqueness. To a significant extent “*Such a Long Journey*” is concerned with Parsi history and politics as modes of accurately understanding Parsi identity though Mistry has always refused to be labeled a political writer, insisting that didacticism is the death of true art, and saying that “*If politics ... come into my work, they come in a secondary way*”¹ His works are indeed not political but his deep concerns with such matters as personal freedom and human communication make it impossible for him not to express his outrage against corruption, decadence and institutional injustices. Rushdie’s observation on fiction as a weapon against political abuse can very well apply to Mistry’s novels.

At times when the state takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, become politicized”. ‘The struggle of man against power’, Milan Kundera has written, ‘is the struggle of memory against forgetting’. Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politician’s version of truth. (Rushdie 14)

The most important historical background described in “*Such a Long Journey*” is the Indo-Pakistan War of December 1971. This was started by a divided election result in the two wings of Pakistan left, predominantly Muslim but geographically and racially separate after the Partition in 1947. The larger force in West Pakistan, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and general Yahya Khan, refused to accept the election result in the East which had gone against them, ordered the arrest of the East’s victorious candidate and proceeded to destroy the opposition in the territory. Brutal repression led to an enormous refugee crisis with, approximately ten million people fleeing across the border into Indian controlled Bengal. Indian government found it very difficult to cope with such huge numbers of people and, as a result, they instituted the Refugee tax which pushed up prices, and which characters complain about in the novel. Nevertheless, population supported the deployment of Indian troops in order to defend the Bengalis. Not wanting to appear the aggressor, Indira Gandhi initially rejected such a move, preferring instead to train and equip guerilla bands based in India but operating across the border. And this is the convergence with the plot in “*Such a Long Journey*”.

Major Jimmy Bilimoria, Gustad’s close friend from the Khodadad Building, suddenly disappeared leaving no explanation for those who had been so close to him, almost like his family. Eventually we discover that he has embarked on a covert mission in the interests of national security and that he works for RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) more exactly, Indian intelligence. It seems that he is engaged in providing funds for the guerrilla groups across the border. However, it is soon apparent that Jimmy has become involved in some curious events which have to do with the embezzlement of large sums of money. The outline of his story is based on that of a parallel historical figure – also a Parsi and, by all accounts, an agent of RAW – Captain Sohrab Rustom Nagarwala. On 24th of May 1971 the Chief Cashier of the State bank of India received a telephone call, apparently from the Prime Minister, instructing him to withdraw six million rupees and hand them over to a person whom he would find waiting on a road, and who would identify himself as ‘*a man from Bangladesh*’. The Cashier obeyed these instructions and then went to the Prime Minister’s residence to ask for a receipt. To his surprise, he was told by the Prime Minister’s private secretary that she had made no such telephone call, and advised to contact the police. He did so, and Captain Nagarwala, who had taken the delivery of the money, was quickly arrested. He seemed to have left an easy trail for the police to follow, and confessed that he had impersonated Indira Gandhi’s voice to obtain money to support guerilla activities in Bangladesh. However, what

¹Hancock, Geoff. “An Interview with Rohinton Mistry” *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 65 (1989): 143-150.

began to raise suspicions at the time, and what was never adequately explained, was the hastily and highly unorthodox manner in which Captain Nagarwala's trial was conducted. Three different judges presided over the case in just three days, at the end of which he was sentenced to four years imprisonment. The police failed to produce in court the tape they claimed to have of Nagarwala's remarkable impersonation of Mrs. Gandhi, and contradictions between his story and that of the State Cashier were never investigated. Moreover, after his arrest Nagarwala appeared to have changed his mind. From prison he appealed for a retrial and tried unsuccessfully to gain an interview with a journalist and fellow Parsi from a Bombay weekly newspaper. A few months later Nagarwala was moved to hospital for allegedly having complained of chest pains, where he died in March, 1972. Obviously such a story raises numerous questions and doubts. Was Nagarwala a scapegoat taking the blame for the corruption among highest rank politicians? How was it possible for the Prime Minister to simply telephone the State Bank and demand money? What was the money really intended for? Further suspicions appeared when the police officer in charge of investigating the case was found dead under mysterious circumstances soon afterwards.

In the fictionalized version of these events Mistry presents history seen through the eyes of a member of the Parsi community. Here, Major Jimmy Bilimoria, a substitute for Nagarwala, tells Gustad during their meeting in New Delhi that he has been ruthlessly deceived and used as a pawn to serve the interest of the Prime Minister and her family exposing thus the corruption and injustices characteristic of those in power. "*Gustad, it is beyond the common man's imagination, the things being done by those in power*" (Mistry, "*Such a Long Journey*" 280) Therefore, the text finds Indira Gandhi guilty of both corruption and murder and presents the readers with an alternative reading – from the margins – which confronts them with the historical truth. The immediate effect of this strategy is that the cultural memory of the Parsi community is preserved and this gives the Parsis the possibility to construct their identity against the hegemonic discourse of postcolonial Hindu history which characterizes a large part of India. Mistry becomes the voice behind his community and renders in his work the Parsi specificity which strongly contrasts the postcolonial Hindu Indian nation. Actually this is the only rational position that a Parsi can adopt since the community is at constant threat by both external (Hindu majority policy) and internal (immigration) causes. He writes against Hindu Otherness and in favor of Parsi Otherness.

However, the Parsi world is not completely isolated from the rest of the Indian society and part from the link provided by Major Jimmy Bilimoria between the community and national politics at large, we discover that other events at national level have direct repercussions on the life of the ordinary citizens. The wars that the country had to fight during the first few decades after its independence have deeply disturbed the private universe of ordinary citizens. Mistry refers to such wars and weaves them into the texture of the novel. He speaks about the 1948 Pakistani invasion on Kashmir, the Indo-China war of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 and that of 1971, which takes place as the action of the novel unfolds. Gustad thinks of the year 1962 as "*such a humiliating defeat, everywhere people talking of nothing but the way Chinese had advanced, as though the Indian army consisted of tin soldiers.*" (Mistry, "*Such a Long Journey*" 9) Dr. Paymaster refers to Lal Bahadur Shastri's proficiency in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 as "*the twenty-one day war with Pakistan in which he fared much better than Nehru had in the war with China, and silenced the unbelievers. Short in height but tall in brains is our Lal Bahadur*" (Mistry, "*Such a Long Journey*" 114) The wars have affected in a negative way the lives of middle-class citizens. The year of the war with China was like a nightmare for both the country and Gustad. He suffered an accident trying to save his son and while he was confined to bed the country suffered humiliation and defeat.

The Bilimoria case remains, though, the pivotal point of the novel and by it Mistry juxtaposes facts with fiction in a postmodernist vein. The newspaper report on Bilimoria's dismissal preserves almost word by word the reports in the press of the time about the dismissal of the real State Bank Cashier Nagarwalla. However, the footnote to the press article suggests that the official facts are not credible, that there are serious reasons to question the validity of the entire story. This also functions as an indirect skeptical authorial commentary on the inconsistencies of the case.

A Footnote: While the alleged facts of this case are certainly unique, what strikes this reporter as even more unusual are the circumstances surrounding this highly imaginative crime. For example, assuming that Mr. Bilimoria has the talent of voice impersonation, is it routine for our national banks to hand over vast sums of money if the Prime Minister telephones? How high up does one have to be in the government or the Congress Party to be able to make such a call? And was the Chief Cashier so familiar to Mrs. Gandhi's voice that he accepted the instructions without any verification whatsoever? If yes, does that mean that Mrs. Gandhi has done this sort of thing frequently? These questions cry out for answers, and till the answers are heard, clearly and completely, the public's already eroded confidence in our leaders cannot be restored. (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 195-196)

These questions raised in the footnote are to be read as a political commentary on the state of the nation and as an attempt by Mistry to reconstruct a story waiting to be told, one that has been deliberately excluded, relegated to the periphery to please those in power. At the time of its occurrence, the Nagarwalla affair impinged negatively upon the small Parsi community. They felt threatened and robbed of their secular pride and honor. This episode of modern Indian history is written from a marginal point of view and tries to uncover suppressed or neglected facts. This re-narration of history depicts anxieties and aspirations, perils and problems of existence for the individual, the community and the nation. Mistry could not have talked about his community without bringing into question the past as this is one of the elements that singularizes a community. But history is always interconnected with political structures and liable to be subjectivised by the degree of the articulation of the individual. As the novel testifies the remembering of history is always problematic.

Parsi Religion

Just like history, religion is one of the most important markers of cultural identity. Thus, it is natural for Mistry to be deeply concerned with foregrounding the Zoroastrian faith. He is sensitive to the anxieties of his community and recognizes the significance of religion and ritual in the construction of human identity. Mistry uses religion, ritual and the responses to these as a central theme in his fiction. Mistry's fiction can be interpreted as the predicament of individuals who try to cope with the contradictions of the past and the present, community and self, family and community. Each of these contexts of individual contradictions and dilemmas is an emotionally charged event in his work. The number of the members of the Parsi community has considerably decreased over the last years and therefore their religion, too, might be in danger of extinction. Mistry as a representative of his community feels bound to take a stand and do something about it. Though he does not comment extensively on the problematic aspects of Zoroastrianism, details about the faith are scattered through the entire novel. Gustad tying and untying his '*kusti*' for his morning prayers, the funeral services for Dinshawji and Jimmy Bilimoria and the dispute between the Reformists and the Orthodox with respect to the best way to handle dead bodies – cremation or vultures.

The orthodox defense was the age-old wisdom that it was a pure method, defiling none of God's good creations: earth, water, air and fire. Every scientist, local or foreign, who had taken the trouble to examine the procedure, using modern hygienic standards, sang its praises. But the reformists, who favored 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. (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 317)

Religion is important as an instance of the text's inscription of cultural difference. Later on though, I would like to argue that religion is not only used in ethnographic terms as a marker of the community's cultural difference but also in sociological terms as a transcendental threshold. Religious rituals, especially those of funeral and burial are presented from a very emotional perspective of the otherwise rational Gustad as he suffers the loss of his friends Dinshawji, Bilimoria and Tehmul. As mentioned earlier, Mistry addresses the question of the adaptation of Parsi rituals to contemporary life. The portrayal of the two funerals that Gustad attends present details of Zoroastrian rituals but also show how even the most rational human beings can find themselves overwhelmed by emotions. Dinshawji's funeral is an intensely personal experience while in the case of Bilimoria's funeral the narrative is slightly more detached and the focus is more on the politics of the body disposal within the Parsi community.

It is not only the funerals and the depiction of religious rituals that emphasize the community's cultural identity but also the dialogue created between characters in the novel. Thus, when Malcolm Saldanha tries to establish the historical superiority of his religion over Zoroastrianism Gustad has his answer ready. Saldanha says that Christianity came to India over 1,900 years ago when Apostle Thomas landed on the Malabar Coast long before the parsis came to India about 1,000 years ago. However, he is forced to give up as Gustad brings to the fore the ancient character of Zoroastrianism. "‘That may be’, rejoined Gustad but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam?" (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 24)

In his criticism of Mistry, Peter Morey detects an analogy between Plato's philosophy and the theological preoccupations of Zoroastrianism. When Gustad goes to Chor Bazaar for one of his meetings with Ghulam Mohammed he buys a copy of Plato's "Dialogues" from a bookstall. Trapped in his own world by his own fears of change - blackout paper, compound wall - Gustad chases shadows that have become threatening only because he cannot bring himself to face them directly. There is a strong attraction to illusion, an attraction to believe what one wishes to believe. Examples of this lure towards illusion vary from Gustad's refusal to accept Sohrab's opinions with respect to the corruption of Indira Gandhi's government – preferring to go on thinking in patriotic terms – to the mosquitoes which irritate him so much and which are attracted by the stench of the urine given off by the wall but which can be diverted towards the reflection of an electric light in a bowl of water:

When the surface grew still, the light bulb's reflection steadied and shone brightly, tantalizingly, under water. Then the mosquitoes started to dive in. One by one, abandoning the real bulb, they plunged unswervingly suicidal in their attempts to reach the aqueous, insubstantial light. Somehow it was a greater attraction than the one hanging from the ceiling. (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 123)

Also, it has been argued that the two realms of existence recognized in Zoroastrianism – the spiritual ('menog') and the material ('getting') – correspond to Plato's notions of physical and ideal realms.

Both Plato and Zarathustra advocated a dualistic view of the universe, though their respective forms of dualism are only superficially related... In Zoroastrianism, unlike Platonism, there is an ethical struggle to make the 'menog' accessible through the 'getting' on the basis that the more good there is in a spatially and temporally finite world the less evil can reside there, whereas the Platonic view tends towards the

*eventual rejection of the entirety of the mundane, allowing the ideal world of forms to be realized and experienced in its totality.*²

In accordance with this belief, Zoroastrianism requires of its followers to participate in the battle against evil. Naturally all forms of ascetism are discouraged as they constitute a retreat from all forms of engagement on behalf of the truth. This desire to engage is what Gustad lacks at the beginning of the novel and needs to develop. His tendency to build barriers and retreat from the real world could be interpreted as an inclination towards asceticism. The novel could also be seen as the protagonist's battle to confront and overcome the urge to withdraw, to be passive. In the end it is only through the action of the virtuous that the good can be promoted and the evil defeated. Irrespective of the result of this dispute it is important to engage on the journey towards perfection.

Parsi Anglophilia and the Role of Language

"*Such a Long Journey*" displays a persistent concern with issues of language, more exactly with the slippery character of language and misrepresentation of reality which can often be very different from appearance. This is obvious in the nature of the names in the novel. Characters take or give up names, give and take nicknames and find that certain names remain while others are forgotten: Mr. Rabadi is nicknamed by Gustad "*the dogwalla idiot*"; Mr. Madon, the bank manager, has a secret first name that no one has managed to find out; old Mr. Cavasji did have a nickname "*watermelon*" but gave it up as it did not suit him any longer; Ghulam Mohamed refers to Jimmy as "*Bili-boy*" while the latter asks Gustad to create bank deposits using an anagram of his real name, Mira Obili and, Dr. Paymaster, the Noble family GP, is prevented by his patients from using his real name on the plate outside his surgery as the fame of the previous name has become too great to be surpassed. Some of these examples are indications that to name means to exert power. "*What's in a name is nothing less than the whole coercive network of relations bounding the subject*"³ This is most evident in Dinshawji's discontent with respect to the renaming of the streets of Bombay using Hindu names by the 'fascist' party Shiv Sena. This was actually a local party with a huge influence in Maharashtra.⁴ Founded in 1966 the party started as a group advocating the reservation of jobs in the lower ranks of white collar-workers. It is a right wing Hindu party with religious preoccupations whose name meant "*Army of Shiva*"⁵

In "*Such a Long Journey*" Shiv Sena is very much despised by Parsi characters as it is perceived as a serious threat to their distinct community identity. Dinshawji is among the ones who articulate their discontent openly:

He turned and slipped into my seat! Insult to injury! What to do with such low class people? No manners, no sense, nothing. And you know who is responsible for this attitude that bastard Shiv Sena leader who worships Hitler and Mussolini. Hand his 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians' nonsense. They won't stop till they have complete Maratha Raj. (Mistry, "*Such a Long Journey*" 73)

Having realized the power of language and naming, such issues become of central importance to the Shiv Sena. A crucial step is to erase all British influence within the city of Bombay despite the fact that this brings about the discontent of the Parsis, a colonial elite community. First Gustad does not grasp the overwhelming cultural importance of the

² Clark, P. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998, pp.78-9 cited by Peter Morey.

³ Williams, David. "Cyberwriting and the Borders of Identity: 'What's in a Name' in Kroetsch's 'The Puppeteer' and Mistry's 'Such a Long Journey'" *Canadian Literature* 149 (1996): 59.

⁴ It is India's third largest state in area and second largest in population 9.4% of India. It is located in the Western part of the country and its capital Mumbai (former Bombay) is India's largest city and a prime centre of economy and culture.

⁵ Shiva is the supreme God in the Shaiva tradition of Hinduism.

translation of all English names into Marathi and so, his friend Dinshawji has to explain things for him:

'No, Gustad' Dinshawji was very serious. 'You are wrong. Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared; in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it's on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with this new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that? Tell me!' (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 74)

The new independent Indian administration has given up British names in an attempt to construct a postcolonial Indian identity free of all foreign influence. But for the Parsi community who had supported colonization and British culture this seems unacceptable and becomes a threat to its identity as well. Dinshawji, like most Parsis, had been educated in this way and as a result anglophilia has become part of his entire being. Apart from the matter of fact consequences which seem easy to understand for everyone he draws attention to the psychological problems created by such an action. There is here an analogy between the disappearance of British names and the erosion of the Parsi community within contemporary postcolonial India. David Williams⁶ observes that *"What Dinshawji laments in the loss of the old names is the loss of the old logocentric security, that metaphysical reassurance via language 'of the meaning of being in general as presence'... Ultimately, he experiences the rewriting of the map of his neighborhood as an interruption in his self presence."* But unfortunately later on in the novel the reader realizes that Dinshawji did not completely understand the overwhelming importance of naming and power. His own behavior when flirting with the charming new typist at the bank, Laurie Coutino, is a proof of the potential sexual violence inherent in language and naming. He misleads the typist with respect to a Parsi slang word which resembles her name making innocent jokes without the latter knowing anything. When she finally finds out, Laurie feels cheated and insulted and tells Gustad during their meeting at the restaurant that: *"'You know how I feel when I think of these men laughing every time he said it? It's so difficult to come to work, I want to resign and tell Mr. Madon why'. Her tone, even and controlled so far, grew emotional. 'If someone speaks my name now, no matter who, I feel bad. It reminds me of the dirty meaning. Mr. Dinshawji has ruined my own name for me. 'She touched the hanky to the corner of one eye."* (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 176) Although Dinshawji had been completely harmless in his attempt to charm the attractive typist this is yet another instance of the gap between reality and its misinterpretation by means of language. Ironically enough the meeting between Laurie and Gustad takes place in one of the upstairs room of a restaurant where normally illicit sexual encounters happen and which contains a sign that reads *"Please Ring Bell For Waiter Under Table"* : *"Now, why would they put a waiter under the table?, said Gustad"* (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 174)

Going back to the problem of the English language and British names most Parsis realize that it is part of their own identity and therefore any attempt to preserve it is worth the effort. Unfortunately for them the nationalist party Shiv Sena had realized that too. Though he does not grasp the importance of language and naming from the very beginning Gustad does perceive the fact that his community is under strain and he points out to such things. As a family man he is very worried about the life and future of his children and preoccupies himself with trying to get the best for them. Thus he broods:

⁶ Williams, David. "Cyberwriting and the Borders of Identity: 'What's in a Name' in Kroetsch's 'The Puppeteer' and Mistry's 'Such a Long Journey'" *Canadian Literature* 149 (1996): 57.

What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward to? No future for minorities, with all this 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. How could he make Sohrab understand this? How to make him realize what he was doing to his father, who had made the success of his son's life the purpose of his own?. (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 55)

This whole passage is emblematic of the fears and distress of the Parsi community. Gustad seems to imply here that there is no secure future in Bombay for the members of the Parsi community if the nationalist party Shiv Sena manages to achieve its goals. The hidden meaning of the passage is that the only opportunity to succeed in life for young Parsis such as Sohrab is immigration. But this does not appear to be a good choice either and certainly not an easy one since immigrants and minorities have to be "twice as good to get half as much". It could also be said that Mistry's language tries to preserve the characteristics of Parsi idiom in order to further highlight the Parsi identity. He does not use Indian English in order to create a comic effect but to challenge and resist the totalization of the dominant culture within India. He uses it naturally with its own distinctive phonetic and syntactic features to establish it as part of the phenomenon of global 'englishes'. It is a post colonial mode of resistance. He uses the colonizers' language to subvert colonial discourse and the hegemony of Western master narratives. Also, Mistry's language retains the peculiarity of the Parsis' way of using language. Dinshawji expresses his anger against Marathas' policy of name changing by saying: "Why change the names? Saala sisterfuckers! Hutatma Chowk! He spat out the words disgustedly. What is wrong with Flora Fountain?" (Mistry, "Such a Long Journey" 73-74) Certainly some words can be categorized as obscene for a cultured society but given the fact that the characters are drawn from Parsi middle class families it may not be out of the ordinary for them to use some abusive terms.

Conclusions

Parsis have perfected the art of existing in a state of marginality, partaking of different cultures yet ultimately retaining for themselves the refuge of ethno-religious identity. For centuries they have been trying to be both global and local at the same time, a difficult endeavor and one that has been acknowledged by the rest of the world only in recent times. The concern with history that informs this novel, and most of Mistry's writings, is evidence of the fact that Mistry writes a postcolonial literature that has something to say about the past. His novels display a deconstruction of history which is supplemented by the construction of new stories – own versions of the truth, challenges to official history and the politicians' truths.

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