CHAPTER-5
SOCIO-POLITICAL IRRITANTS

When the Europeans took over the land which is now called America, a debate started whether the native inhabitants of the New World were human beings leading a standard kind of life or barbarians according to the classical definition of barbarians, for which they turned to the ancient Greek sage Aristotle. Now, Aristotle had defined man as a political animal. The city was the highest manifestation of human achievement. The criterion for civilized behaviour was determined by the capacity to live in organized communities. Since the American Indians lacked a centralized political authority, they were not considered humans! So, they were fit only to be enslaved!¹

The politicians, as always, queer the pitch. If the French fought against the tyranny of Emperor Louis XIV during the French Revolution, they were in turn, ditched by another politician Napoleon Bonaparte, who defeated the purpose of the Revolution. The working of the political class leaves much to be desired. No doubt, politics is struggle for power but there are definitely rules of the game. Power is to be attained through fair means and not foul. Besides, that power is not an end in itself; it is, as Mahatma Gandhi believed, held on behalf of the people in trust. It is to be used to bring about the welfare of the masses. There are examples of good politicians who raised the stock of their country sky-high in the eyes of the world through sheer good work. No country can prosper without good leadership. If Japan and Germany sprang back to their old glory after the catastrophic world wars, it was largely due to the efforts of their leaders guiding a dedicated people. A bad leader like Yahya Khan in Pakistan can unleash untold misery on the people of East Pakistan that can lead to the dismemberment of the country.
What is sought to be underlined here is that the individual, howsoever benign and noble he might be, is subject to political authority. And the political class is hardly concerned about questions of conscience or even about the rules of the game in the world. The politicians are adept at adapting any ideal to their penchant for power. Hypocrisy is writ large on the face of the politician. He may talk of human rights and human welfare, but what he intends doing is yoking the human to serve his own selfish ends. Therefore, quite befittingly, the ends of humanism take the form of human rights in the political domain.

Here in India, the infamous Nagarwala incident occurred at the height of Bangladesh war. Mr Nagarwala was a Parsi and the community felt that it tarnished their image as a law-abiding community. In fact, the novel Such a Long Journey is based, to a great extent, on that incident and it tries to prove the innocence of Nagarwala, who is presented as Major Bilimoria in the novel. Gustad’s life is affected badly by external political events of the national magnitude. If Major Bilimoria had not sent Gustad ten lakh rupees and Gustad had not deposited the amount in the bank, he would not have courted trouble. Major Bilimoria’s trouble was closely linked to the political turmoil in Bangladesh which impacted India also. In A Fine Balance too, the personal lives of Dina, Om, Ishwar and Maneek became hellish due to the vitiated political climate of the country reeling under the infamous Emergency regime.

Major Jimmy Bilimoria is a key character in the novel Such a Long Journey. He had no family of his own and he loved his friends as his own brothers. A lone soldier, Major Bilimoria fought against the Pakistanis in 1948 and also encountered the tribesmen from the North-West frontier. Being a retired army man, he was recruited by RAW and was engaged in secret service for the country. RAW or the Research and Analysis Wing is the front name for
India’s top intelligence agency. He was charged with the duty to send money and supplies to the Mukti Bahini fighters who were taking on the military might of Pakistan.

Unwittingly, Bilimoria becomes a pawn in the power politics of the country. To start with, we find him as Gustad’s friend and neighbor. He leaves Khodadad building abruptly without speaking a word to any of his neighbours, thus leaving them wonder-struck. Gustad could not understand all this. He was still expecting letter or any communication from Jimmy’s side. Finally, we come to know that Gustad receives a letter from Major Bilimoria in which he tells about his job. He requests Gustad to collect a packet from a book – stall in the ‘Chor Bazar’. Gustad shared all this with his wife Dilnavaz who tried to dissuade him from acting according to the Major’s wishes. But Gustad, as a good humanist, had forgotten the Major’s treachery and was determined to help him. This thing cost him very dearly in the long run.

Gustad received the packet from Ghulam Mohammad. Later, he noticed that the packet contained ten lakh rupees. Dilnavaz requested Gustad to return the money. Gustad reminded her that Major had instructed him to deposit the amount in the account of some Mira Obili. It was easier said than done because depositing ten lakh rupees in a fictitious account was not a simple job. However, with the help of his friend and colleague Dinshawji, however, Gustad deposited the money. But then the matter became public and Bilimoria was caught. He was imprisoned and threatened with dire consequences unless the money was paid back. As a result, word was sent to Gustad via Ghulam Mohammad to withdraw the money which was done in the same way. Naturally, Gustad and his wife were put to great mental strain. They cursed Bilimoria but when Ghulam prevailed upon him to visit Delhi to meet the Major, Gustad came to know the reality.
Major Jimmy Bilimoria’s suffering and agony after he was trapped badly in the political scandal is heart-rending. He is accused in the way Nagarwala was accused. When Gustad reached the jail hospital in Delhi where Bilimonia was lodged, he found that he was seriously ill. He had been looking forward to lighten his heart and explain the whole thing to his friend Gustad. The story that he told him made Gustad’s hair stand on end.

As a RAW officer, he was entrusted with the duty to supply funds to the Mukti Bahini fighting the Pakistani forces in the then East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh. He found that after he handed over money to the contacts, it did not reach the Mukti Bahini. After examining, he found that the money had been rerouted from the Prime Minister’s office to a private account and probably used “to finance her son’s car factory” or for election.

He no longer had faith in authority. This conversation with Gustad reveals the corruption that is rampant in the top-level power-structure in our country.

‘She [Indra Gandhi] said, I arranged for money…because Mukti Bahini must be helped …but. Having second thoughts. She said, I have enemies… everywhere. If they find out about this money, they will use the information against me. No difference to them that money is for a good cause…our country will suffer if government destabilized. Very dangerous border situation…CIA, Pakistani agents…

‘It made sense. Shall I bring the money back, I asked. She said no, Mukti Bahini must not suffer…should be another way.

‘She said, only problem is my telephone call to the chief cashier…he might talk. Must correct that. How, I asked, he had heard her voice. She said, yes, but he did not see me speaking…we can always say someone imitated my voice.
‘Very clear woman, Gustad. She said if my enemies try to make trouble all you have to say is … you imitated my voice. I laughed…who would believe this? But she said under the proper conditions people will believe anything. She promised … nothing would happen to me.

‘Like a fool I agreed … trusted her. Then she said, maybe we should make our plan watertight…you can write a few lines just now. A confession that you imitated my voice …because you wanted to continue helping Mukti Bahini.[…] I wrote my confession…. Like an idiot. ’

The whole thing was still revealed, thanks to some enterprising journalists. The following note appended by the editor of the newspaper to the news item concerning the money-withdrawal episode was quite revealing and provided ammunition to the opposition parties:

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. Bilimonia 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 with Mrs. Gandhi’s voice that he accepted the instructors 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.

Needless to add that the Prime Minister felt jittery after the publication of such reports and probably upon her instance, the Major (representing the real Nagarwala) was incarcerated and slowly poisoned to death. It is truly said that
“Jimmy becomes a victim of the poitical machinations. For Mistry, Jimmy is an example of the way, the common man is betrayed and used in a corrupt socio-political system that constitutes the pillars of a nation.”

Gustad’s conversation with Bilimoria in jail is all about corruption in the government at the highest level, even in the RAW. Rohinton Mistry shows through him how a man who is simple at heart is so easily trapped. His pathetic death puts a question mark on the integrity of the politicians who profit from the selfless work of patriots like Major Bilimoria.

He was disillusioned as this comment shows: “Whole day and night I sat in my flat. Doing nothing… just thinking. What hope for the country? With such crooked leaders? Whole day and night… I sat thinking of all the people I had come across in my life … men in the army, good men. And my Ghulam Mohammed. Khodadad Building… the families living there. You and Dilnavaz, the children, the ambitions you have for them. And those bastards, those ministers and politicians, those ugly buffaloes and pigs… getting fatter and fatter, sucking our blood…” Jimmy trembled choking with vehemence.

It was then that he decided to put aside ten lakh rupees from the total of sixty lakh rupees for helping his needy friends.

In his novels, Mistry has taken up important problems facing India. Casteism and the consequent untouchability is the bane of Indian society. It can be seen in its ugliest form in the villages. No doubt, it is the most inhuman practice – an anachronism in our times. Examples of torture of lower castes by the upper castes are quite common in the villages. The writer probably depends upon reports of bygone times when he refers to the heinous practice of pouring molten lead into the ears of one, when he ventured too close to the temple to be within its hearing range. One was stoned and another one forced to eat excreta on little excuse or crime. Even one person was hanged because he was
suspected of poisoning the cows. Cutting of fingers or hands was common though in the these accounts, the author seems to be exaggerating the facts. All the same, the humanist approach of the writer comes into play here.

Dukhi Mochi’s children – ten-year old Ishvar and eight-year old Narayan showed the temerity to enter the haloed precincts of a village school. They were curious to find out what really happened in those class-rooms. They saw chalk and slates and started trying their hand at drawing lines on the slate and even on their forehead like the upper-caste Brahmins did. But they were soon caught by the teacher who gave them a sound beating for such ‘blasphemy’ of the ‘achoot’ boys. When their father Dukhi Mochi came to know of it, he called at Pandit Lalluram, a Chit-Pavan Brahmin which means he enjoyed a very high status among the Brahmins.

The description of the Brahmin and his dirty nose-picking, farting and kneading of dirt on body would upset any reader, but then a person with such unclean habits explained to Dukhi the concept of cleanliness! The age-old social norms are biased heavily in favour of the upper caste people: “Your children entered the classroom. They polluted the place. They touched instruments of learning. They defiled slates and chalks, which upper-caste children would touch. You are lucky there wasn’t a holy book like the Bhagavad Gita in that cupboard, no sacred texts. Or the punishment would have been more final.”

As is common in the countryside, a child of a chamar (tanner-cobbler) would be a chamar only. That is the age old practice still continuing there. Dukhi decided to send both his children to the nearby town, to Ashraf so that they could learn the art of tailoring from him. When Narayan came back as an accomplished tailor and established himself in the village, he started getting
good clientele. This is what made the upper-caste people jealous of Narayan and his father.

The picture of social injustice portrayed by Mistry is true of any Indian village. While massaging the cracked toes of his father, Narayan has the following conversation with his father:

‘I was just thinking that...thinking how nothing changes. Years pass, and nothing changes.’

Dukhi sighed again but not with pleasure. ‘How can you say that? So much has changed. Your life, my life. Your occupation, from leather to cloth. And look at your houses, your –

‘Those things, yes. But what about the more important things? Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper caste bastards still treat us worse than animals.’

‘Those kinds of things take time to change.’

‘More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I live.’

It shows resentment brewing among the ordinary villagers belonging to the lower classes who have been suppressed for ages. But Dukhi is not proud of son’s revolutionary ideas. He knows from experience the price that one has to pay to afford the luxury of such views in an Indian village. He is afraid, so he says, ‘Son, those are dangerous things to want. You changed from Chamaar to tailor. Be satisfied with that.’
Mistry also trains his humanist gaze at the politics as it is practised in these villages. The parliamentary elections are declared and here Mistry gets a chance to juxtapose the marginalized with the powerful of the land. How year after year politicians make the same promises to provide clean water, health care, new schools etc. and to abolish untouchability, bonded labour, child labour, sati, dowry system, child marriage etc. and then, after the elections are over, they forget all. “There must be a lot of duplication in our country’s laws,” said Dukhi. “Every time there are elections, they talk of passing the same ones passed twenty years ago. Someone should remind them they need to apply the laws.”

During elections, booth capturing is quite common and the person who captures maximum booths, gets elected. Narayan is in full resentment over such developments. He promises his father: “Next time there is an election, I want to mark my own ballot.” After two years, state assembly elections are declared. Narayan has not forgotten the promise made to his father. He insists on marking his own ballot in the booth, and then all hell breaks loose. Thakur Dharamsi, with the help of his men, brutally tortures him to death. He is still not satisfied and asks his men to burn his house, with all the members of his family, bound and dragged into the main room. So all are burnt alive, except Ishvar and Om who happen to be away to town presently. Mistry puts the position of the subaltern in the historical context in the following remark:

What the ages had put together. Dukhi had dared to break asunder: he had turned cobblers into tailors, distorting society’s timeless balance—Crossing the line of caste had to be punished with utmost severity, said the Thakur.

To add insult to injury, no one agrees to even note the First Information Report (F.I.R), rather they are threatened by the Sub-Inspector: “Trying to fill
up the F.I.R with lies? You filthy Achhoot castes are always out to make trouble. Get out before we charge you with public mischief.”¹² Very helpless, they return to Ashraf’s comforting arms. Mistry tries here to awaken his readers to the brutal reality of the Indian countryside, where lower casters are treated as worse than animals.

How the human rights of poor people are trampled upon is graphically shown in the novel *A Fine Balance*. The tailors Om and Ishvar, along with other inhabitants of their hutment colony, are forcibly taken to the rally with the promise of payment of five rupees and tea and snacks, to swell the crowd at the rally. As Raja Ram remarks, “Much easier to get them [crowd] wholesale in the city jhopad patties.”¹³ How the politicians behave like clowns at a rally organized to facilitate the Prime Minister! When a local politician first prostrates before the Prime Minister on stage, in front of the whole crowd, Raja Ram remarks: “I told you it’s going to be a day at the circus. We have clowns, monkeys, acrobats, everything.”¹⁴

All the leaders at the rally and even the Prime Minister deliver speeches about how they were working for the benefit of common people. Ironically, it is the common people like tailors and their neighbors, who have to return hungry without any tea and snacks, and fully exhausted, having lost whole of their earning day at the rally. “Better tell the Prime Minister your jobs are in danger if she takes you again to a meeting”, Dina gives them the parting advice next day.”¹⁵

A few days later, after returning from work tailors are astonished to find their colony being flattened by the bulldozers. With great difficulty they are able to retrieve some of their belongings in their old trunk. “They said it’s a new Emergency law. If shacks are illegal they can remove them. The new law says the city must be made beautiful.”¹⁶ With no place to sleep, they go to the
railway platform but here too they are denied sleeping space without bribing the policeman on duty. Ironically, the city is full of the Prime Minister’s hoardings with slogans like: ‘The city belongs to you!’ ‘Keep it beautiful!’ and ‘The nation is on move!’ They check place after place but with no luck. With great difficulty, they find a place to sleep in front of a chemist shop with the permission of the watchman by paying him two rupees for each night spent there. But ill-luck has not left them. One night, they are forcibly taken away to a dam construction site along with hordes of beggars and pavement dwellers to work as free labour under the city beautification project!

It is quite common to find details of the Emergency period in India in the books dealing with recent history but what one cannot expect to find in them is the description of the sentiments of the common people. This is possible only in social novels like the present one. Mistry has indeed taken great pains to fish out this alternative history. In fact, this fascination for the recent history of one’s native country marks the diasporic literature in general. According to Nila Shah, “This proliferation of ‘alternative histories of the excluded’ produces a pluralist anarchy on one hand and recreates the nation it belongs to on the other.”

No description of the notorious Emergency regime in India can be complete without reference to the so-called family planning camps. This is not to deny the need for such camps in order to cap India’s burgeoning population, but for a humanist like Mistry, no violation of human rights is tolerable. The extent of atrocities committed at these camps can be gauged from the fact that these cost the ruling party heavily when it lost the elections after the emergency was revoked. The term Family Planning became the nightmare for the Congress party. Even other parties also started shying away from the concept of birth control. The result has been negative in that the problem of population
growth has been forsaken by the political parties which would cost India heavily in time to come.

Coming back to the inhuman conduct of family planning camps during the Emergency days, it was quite common for the police to round up common people without giving any reason. The people thus picked up from the pavements are forced to work and are merely paid food and ramshackle shelter. No safety is ensured for the labourers. What is more, the fellow workers follow the rule of ‘might is right’. So, fatal injuries on these hapless, unpaid workers are common. There seems no escape for the tailors from this place until the Beggarmaster comes there to augment his work force.

While Ishvar and Om are roaming in the market, suddenly many police vans swoop down the market with horns blaring. They start capturing people indiscriminately, irrespective of their age or gender and throwing them into garbage trucks. This is the exact representation of reality during the Emergency days. Old men, young boys, housewives with children, all are dragged into the trucks. Om and Ishvar are forcibly dragged into the garbage truck and taken to the sterilization camp where sterilization operation is performed on all -- old as well as young men, on women past child-bearing age, on men already sterilized and even on unmarried young boys. As the number of patients is much more than can be accommodated at that time, the autoclave machine used for sterilizing the operation instruments breaks down and the operations are carried out with partially or unsterilized instruments under unhygienic conditions without caring for the consequences. As targets are to be met within the stipulated time, doctors are pressurized to perform the operations in haste.

For a writer to take pains to research into the ways of the dark world of beggars is not an easy thing, particularly when he or she happens to be settled
abroad. One really marvels at the labour put in by Mistry in collecting details which make the work very realistic. It is certainly his humanistic attitude which comes to the fore through such description. The Beggarmaster is not a figment of imagination. In fact, such people exist in poor societies. The lure for the lucre makes man inventive. So, organizing beggars and beggary becomes big business in a big city. Naturally, the person running such sordid business would be a type of mafia don. The Beggarmaster here also rules the underworld, but as his personal details emerge, we come to sympathize with him for he has also been imbued with human streak by the humanist Mistry.

This Beggarmaster takes the crippled, mutilated or injured workers and trains them to work as beggars. With the help of Shankar, the Beggarmaster’s favourite beggar, who later turns out to be his brother, Om and Ishvar succeed in persuading him to take them out of this place. The Beggarmaster agrees but only on the condition that he will be paid fifty rupees a week per person, for one year. So very haggard, injured and exhausted they return to Dina’s house.

Mistry portrays the picture of a representative politician in Dharamsi, who is a big man in the Congress Party with chances of becoming a minister in the next election. So, to look responsible, he avoids direct confrontation but takes the help of police to take revenge upon his enemies. He is now in charge of a Family Planning Centre. Villagers are too helpless before him. Whenever he needs volunteers for sterilization operation, they either offer themselves or their wives out of fear. And he even auctions the patients to government employees as it is compulsory for them to produce two or three cases for sterilization every month, otherwise their salary and promotions are held back.

So the thakur invites all the school teachers, block development officers, tax collectors, food Inspectors and others to the clinic. Anyone who wants to can
“bid on the villagers. Whoever offers the most gets the cases registered in his quota.”19 With the example of Thakur Dharamsi, Mistry indicates the criminalization of politics and shows how the common people are afraid of these politicians, who never fail in taking advantage of their hapless condition to fulfill their own selfish motives. It is surprising how his co-religionist Keki N. Daruwala faults Mistry for the latter’s “never-ending wallow in misery and adiatribe against the State.”20 To him Mistry may be a “novice” but when one considers that Daruwala was a police officer, the charge falls in proper perspective.

Ashraf and the two tailors Ishvar and Om happen to come to the market and pass before the family planning centre. Just then thakur Dharamsi emerges from the building. Om strides boldly towards him on a collision course. Ishvar tries to pull him back and in retaliation Om spits towards the Thakur. “I know, who you are”, Thakur said softly and vanished from the scene.21

Ishvar was full of rage and anxiety over Om’s misbehaviour and the nemesis comes the very next day in the market. That day was noisier than usual because the Family Planning Centre was promoting its sterilization camp from a booth in the square. Ashraf tells them about the callous way, the sterilization operations are done: “They set it up like a factory. Cut here, snip there a few stitches and the goods are ready to be shipped. Actually we tailors take more pride in our work. We show more consideration for fabric than these monsters show for humans. It is nation’s scheme.”22 Similar are the views expressed by a critic:

During the course of the pulsating narrative, without any obvious authorial intrusions, Mistry sharply criticizes the internal Emergency. He shows that all the avowed promises of the Emergency to abolish bonded labour, child labour, sati, dowry system, child marriage
and harassment of backward castes by upper castes never materialized. Instead as Mistry shows in several instances in the novel a nexus emerges between the police and the established hierarchy -- either the upper dominance in the villages or the land/building mafia in Bombay.  

In one of his interviews, Mistry’s humanist bent of mind is clearly articulated:

Given the parameters of my characters’ lives, given who they are, how can you expect them to have any more happiness than they have found? I think that the ending is a hopeful one: The human spark is not extinguished. They continue to find humour in their lives. This is an outstanding victory in their case. What’s more, there are thousands and thousands of Ishvars and Oms in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the odds, and this is why I am hopeful.

The politico Dharamsi has his vengeance upon poor Om who is not castrated like Ishvar but is bobbitized so that any chance of his producing children in future is removed. This is a very big set back to both of them. Ishvar wails in vain, for no one comes to their rescue. This shows the callous way in which politics works in India. There are just no rules of the game here. It is quite clear that humanism has its biggest enemy in the politician who uses the label of humanist for himself but he actually uses it as a ploy to serve his selfish ends. A critic rightly notes, “A Fine Balance can be read as an expression of the predicament of the self in the Indian urban/rural context. In spite of its stark realism, the novel reveals an underlying moral purpose and a positive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns.”

The local level politics in the countryside presents a sordid picture indeed, but the politics of the metropolitan city of Bombay is hardly better. We come across the inhuman ways of big politicians here. The scene is the rally of a
candidate belonging to the ruling Congress party who organizes it to show support for the Prime Minister from his constituency. The Prime Minister is riding the tiger of emergency which is difficult to dismount. It might be mentioned here that Mistry has no soft corner for any political party. In his novel *Family Matters*, we come across revelations of the nefarious practices of Shiv Sena. Elsewhere we have uncharitable references to B.J.P. also, which means the writer treats all major political parties as chips of the same block.

Yezad is the chief protagonist of the novel, *Family Matters*. He lives happily with his wife Roxana and two sons Murad and Jehangir in the Pleasant Villa, presented to him by his father-in-law as a marriage gift. He is seen to be leading a quiet life as an ordinary honest Indian. It is the politically-charged atmosphere of Bombay that leads him astray and upsets his world.

Yezad has been working as a manager for fifteen years, in a sports shop named Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium which is run by Mr. Kapur. With his limited salary, he feels it impossible to make both ends meet. Besides, he has to meet the school expenses of his two children, rising prices of consumables and to add to all this, a sick father-in-law who has been kicked out by his step son and step daughter. He has to accommodate him even though there is no room in the tiny flat. Shortage of money results in frequent quarrels with his wife. All this has made his life unbearable. Mr. Kapur’s intention to fight municipal election comes to him as a pleasant surprise because he feels he will then be promoted to help his boss in election work also which would bring with it some more money. But then soon, Mr Kapur changes his mind. This dashes Yezad’s hopes to the ground.

Yezad makes a devious plan to make money with two of his friends Gautam and Bhaskar. Taking advantage of the atmosphere created by the Shiv Sena, they will threaten Mr. Kapur and demand extortion money. One day, Yezad
tells Mr Kapur that two men from Shiv Sena paid a visit and said that “They are informing all shops, hotels, any business with Bombay in its name, that they had to change it to Mumbai with in thirty days or pay a fine.” They require down payment of thirty thousand rupees, plus five thousand every month for as long as they want to keep Bombay. Mr Kapur is incensed beyond control because he is in love with all that is associated with old Bombay, its name, its buildings and its culture. Later, he cools down and decides to pay the money.

Mr. Kapur gives Yezad a packet of thirty five thousand as extortion money to hand it over to those two goondas. However, it is coincidence that two people from Shiv Sena actually come to the shop at the same time and tell Mr Kapur to change the name of his shop. Mr. Kapur abuses them and after a fight between them, they stab him to death.

Yezad now blames himself for the death of Mr. Kapur, “he’d been able to think of nothing but his scheming with Vilas and the actors, blaming him, blaming himself for what had happened to Mr. Kapur – poor man, needlessly dead – no wonder he thought he was being double crossed when the real Shiv-Sainik come-but who knew they would?” His essential human nature has awakened and repentance overtakes him.

In order to forget his misdeed, he indulges in chanting the sacred prayer all the time. But Rohinton Mistry believes in humanism. Religion does not help him. Nilufer Bharucha comments, “Now suddenly unemployed, religion becomes a full-time solace and he retreats into it to lick his wounds. However, instead of turning him into a stronger and better person, this agiary-going turns him into a bigot, the sort of man he used to despise.” He becomes a religious fanatic and spends all his time in the reading religious books. This also has impact on his family. He does not like Murad’s friendship with a
non-Parsi girl. He does not allow Murad to enter the holy area after his haircut. When Murad argues with him, “If an impure fly or mosquito or cockroach violates the boundary how you check if they have showered?” Yezad drags him by the arm to the other end of the room and says “you approach that side again in your unclean conditions and I’ll break your legs!” His bending towards religion keeps him away from his family.

Another worker at Mr Kapur’s shop was the attendant Husain, the victim of the Post-Babri riots which rocked Bombay. Mr. Kapur, his boss, was also a victim of the 1947 Hindu-Muslim clashes during the partitions of India. These catastrophic events were the handiwork of politicians only. The Maharashtra state elections of 1995 took place against a background of anti-Muslim sentiments resulting from the civil unrest, which followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque two and a half years earlier. Drawing on the appeal to a broad spectrum of the Bombay population, and raising the banners of Hindutvta, the Shiv Sena also exploited the lack of development in the city. It employed flexible tactics and a posse of young, vigorous activists trained to see political work as part of a larger struggle, sometimes requiring unscrupulous methods and direct physical violence, and was involved in such nefarious activities as protection rackets, illegal land deals, and drugs and contraband smuggling. The movement of the Shiv Sena from fringe player to main actor in the unfolding drama of Bombay politics both indicates, and is a symptom of, what has been described as the “criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime”, so rampant in India in the last decade of the twentieth century.”

Husain saw his wife and children being burnt before his eyes and he could not help them. The rioters burnt them alive because they were Muslims out to take the revenge of demolition in Ayodhya. “Husain and his Muslim
neighbours were watching as their Chawl went up in flames, wondering where his wife and three sons were and then four burning figures tumbling down the steps of the building, their smoking hands beating at the flames while the goondas sprinkled more kerosene from their cans over Husain’s family."

The political outfits pounce upon any opportunity that might hold promise of votes, regardless of its ethical weakness. The Shiv Sainiks gave the excuse for changing the name of the city from Bombay to Mumbai, as a work of social welfare. They said that they were working for the uplift of the poor. But in reality they indulged in anti-social activities. As Husain said, “Sahab, I wanted to say it’s not good to fight with Shiv Sena. With them you can never win.”

Two people from Shiv Sena come to Mr. Kapur and demanded extortion money from him. They ask him to change the name of his shop from Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium to Mumbai Sporting Goods Emporium. They call themselves social workers. But Husain recognizes them. He says, “You know when Mosque was destroyed and all the riots were flaming, these bad people killed so many innocents, with my own eyes I saw it, sahab, they locked them in the houses and set fire to them, they attacked people with swords and axes.”

So, this is the reality of the political workers, who have, of late, taken a fancy to the term ‘social workers’!

There is no clear-cut philosophy of political parties in India; if it is any, it is the philosophy of opportunism. The Shiv Sena which projected itself as a culturally purist party, had no problem with arranging the Michael Jackson Concert in Bombay! They even got the tax-free status for it arguing that it was a cultural even of national significance! But for them “South-Indians are anti-Bombay, Valentine’s Day is anti-Hinduism, film stars born before 1947 in the Pakistani part of Punjab are traitors of the country!”
Mistry goes all out against the political culture of the country. All the political parties themselves indulge in anti-social activities, and if journalists write against them, they frighten them. Bhaskar, one of Yezad’s friends tells that life of journalists is not easy. He tells that a journalist did a story about Matka and did an in-depth analysis about the political-criminal police nexus. Shiv Sena was also mentioned in his article, and they did not like it. He tells Yezad that some days back goondas caught a journalist outside his office and applied Cherry Blossom shoe polish to his face and ears and neck. “One thing is certain,” said Bhaskar, “the article hit a nerve. People think it’s not so bad when Shiv Sena extorts money from rich businessmen – ‘donations’ for their ‘charity’ work. But Matka also finances Shiv Sena machinery. And Matka money paid for the plastic explosive with which the terrorists blew up the stock exchange. You see the Paradox? The enemies of the nation, and political parties that claim to be defenders of nation, all rely on the same source.”

In this way, Mistry diagnoses the problem of politics-black money nexus, On the face of it, the political party claims to work for the ‘sons of the soil’ but in reality, it only divides humanity in two groups – Maharashtrians and non-Maharashtrians. Dewnarain’s comment is quite apt here: “Mistry suggests that a universal humanity must inform the complex negotiation of the ‘self’ and the ‘Other’. Compassion and a sense of humanism must override a politics that seeks only to denigrate, corrupt and destroy the ‘Other’ through varied fundamentalism and rejection. He articulates the need for rediscovery of faith, accompanied by a critical stance towards inherited belief systems and a rejection of intolerant traditions.”
References


3Ibid., pp. 195-96.


7 Ibid., p. 114.

8 Ibid., p. 142.

9 Ibid., p. 143.

10 Ibid., p. 144.

11 Ibid., p. 147.

12 Ibid., p. 148.

13 Ibid., p. 259.

14 Ibid., p. 261.

15 Ibid., p. 272.

16 Ibid., p. 295.

17 Ibid., p. 303.


22 Ibid., p. 514.


27 Ibid., p. 405.

28 Ibid., p.193.

29 Ibid., p.404.

30 Ibid., p.132.

31 Ibid., p.144.

32 Ibid., p.386.

33 Ibid., p.386.

34 Ibid., p.32.

35 Ibid., p.207.