Chapter III

Fictional World Of Rohinton Mistry
Minority, in international law, population group with a characteristic culture and sense of identity occupies a subordinate political status. Religious minorities were known from ancient times, but ethnic minorities did not become an issue in European politics until the rise of nationalism in the 19th century. The potential conflict arose from nationalism’s education of the nation with the identity of the dominant cultural group, with an attempt to eradicate separate identities through conformity. The minority group sought to establish its own culture as a national identity, either by incorporating with a nearby country that shared its identity, or if none existed by seceding and forming its own nation.

The Parsis have always been on the forefront ever since, but the attempt of charting the cultural space was never so desperate in their writing. Works of Bapsi Sidhwa, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Boman Desai, Dina Mehta are some of the major Parsi novelists, exhibit ethno-religious traits. Especially in the wake of the Partition of the sub-continent, the Parsis and their affiliations with the colonizers and anglophile inclination – distanced themselves from the mainstream Indian Society.

The decline in demographical figures made them apprehensive and the rising communal disharmony has intensified their community consciousness more than ever before. According to A. K. Singh:

Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in such a way that the community emerges as a protagonist from their
works through on the surface these works deal with their human protagonists. (1997: 66)

Born in India, Rohinton Mistry immigrated to Canada in 1975, after obtaining an undergraduate degree in mathematics and economics at St. Xavier’s college Mumbai, in 1973. While attending the University of Toronto he won Hart House literary Prizes for stories which were published in the Hart House Review, and Canadian Fiction Magazine’s annual contributors’ Prize for 1985. Two years later, Penguin Books Canada published his collection of 11 short stories, Tales From Firozsha Baug (1987).

His second novel, Such A Long Journey (1991), won the Governor’s General’s Award, The Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book and the W.H. Smith / Books in Canada First Novel Award. It was shortlisted for the Prestigious Booker Prize and for the Trillium Award. It has been translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Japanese, and has been made into the 1998 film Such A Long Journey.

Such A Long Journey creates a vivid picture of Indian family life in general and that of a close knit Parsi family in particular and tells a story rich in subject matter and characterization set in the years around early seventies Mumbai. The novel mainly deals with its protagonist, Gustad Novel’s modest dreams and aspirations. The novelist has dovetailed various narratives with the central narrative of Gustad who co-inhabits in a small flat in Khodadad Building with other members of his community. As the novel
unfolds, Gustad learns a few of the severe lessons of life and is compelled to kneel down to some inexplicable forces more powerful than he has to modify his dreams and expectations to survive. The Khodadad Building, which enshrines several Parsi families, is a world in itself.

*Such A Long Journey* examines the life of a handful of Parsi Indian. In India, Hindus predominate, although society is officially secular. Parsis are a tiny, secretive religious minority. The inhabitants of Khodadad Building in north of Bombay are all Parsis. The most pious of them is Gustad Noble. At 6 am, Gustad begins his prayers in the Courtyard of the apartment complex. It presents the dealing with the dailies’ of the protagonist’s world. It unfailingly captures the fading glory of the Parsis in general and of the Nobel’s in particular, reflecting the religio-cultural concern of the author. Mistry has carefully delineated a picture of a middleclass Parsi gentleman absorbed in his daily Kusti:

He recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti from around his waist. When he had unwound all nine feet of its slim, sacred, hand–woven length, he cracked it, whip-like: Once, twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven away – with that expert flip of the wrists, possessed only by those who performed their kusti regularly (SLJ 1991: 4)

Beside the rituals like kusti and the recitals of Yatha Ahu Varyo and Ashem Vahoo, Mistry takes his readers on a journey of the Tower of Silence and fire temples, places otherwise closed for the non-Parsis. The ethnocentric
nature of his work discerns the assertion of difference and fragmentation of identity, creating its own space within the national and diasporic context. The author’s own expatriate position makes him aware of the elements of alienation. He is an existential outsider on one hand and on the other, is on the periphery even in India as Nilufer Bharucha puts it,

So his discourse challenges and resists the totalization of the dominant culture within India itself (1998: 25)

Mistry has portrayed the feelings and apprehensions of a minority community through some of the historical events. The life style of Parsis living in Khodadad Building is the microcosm of the Parsis in India. He has exploited history to probe into broader concerns of Parsis in India. He has exploited history to probe into broader concerns of Parsis and of national identity with fate and war as two major themes of the novel and has taken much pain to reflect on these themes at personal, social and national levels.

On the other levels, the wall and the blackout papers on the windowpanes indicate closed world of the Nobels. Significantly, the wall, which protects the residents of Khodadad Building form the outsiders, limits their world within a three hundred feet wall of enclosed area and the blackened windows, remainders of the wars, restrict ‘The ingress of all forms of light, earthly and celestial’ (SLJ 1991: 11) As Dilnawaz complains, ‘In this house, the morning never seems to come’ (SLJ 1991: 11)
Mistry, it seems, uses this chromo type of time and space to problematic and redefine the deliberately cultivated insularity of the Parsi community. Incidentally, Gustad, with the help of the Pavement artist, changed the wall into a wall of all religions signifying Indian Secularism as described by one of the characters, ‘A good mixture like this is a perfect example for our secular country, that’s the way it should be.’ (SLJ 1991:214)

Although their joy was short lived as the Municipal Corporation destroys the wall in order to widen the road the history of community and that of a certain period of a country pulsates throughout the novel. At one level Gustad’s fate resembles the fate of a nation. India Like Gustad – confronted with many wars and the after math is under trauma, and she limps awkwardly, with her limbs fractured by Chinese invasions during the sixties. On the other level, the writer’s concerns for his community are depicted through various characters. Mistry, like his other counterpart elsewhere, deals with the past and present of his community. The novel recounts the journey of the Parsis who came to this land all the way from Iran in the 7th Century A.D. Gustad, proud of his ancient roots, counters Malcom’s argument that Christianity came to India over nineteen hundred years ago……

but our prophet Zarathustra lived more that 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 Zoroastrians influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam? (SLJ 1991: 24)
Various characters belonging to the Parsi community highlights peculiar traits of their community. The author tries to consider the possibilities of bringing in some sort of changes with the course of time:

It was not all jokes and singing in the canteen, though. Sometimes the hour went in passionate argument about matters that concerned the community, such as the Tower of Silence controversy. (SLJ 1991: 72)

And the reformer’s proposal to introduce the cremation would always result in flared up tempers. More often than not, together with their traditions, their fears and anxieties are the focal points to characters of the novel. For instance: ‘Wait till Marathas take over, then we will have real Gundaraj.’ (SLJ 1991:73) Gustad voices his concerns about rising communal forces:

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 men to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this? (SLJ 1991: 55)

The Prime minister, Indira Gandhi is seen as detrimental to their interest. To them, she and her father have done injustice to Feroz Gandhi member of their community. Their acrimony against her is not altogether invalid as Mrs. Gandhi, during the controversial period of their rule, first nationalized the banks, which destroyed Parsis’ sovereignty over the banking system, and she
tricked and entrapped one of their community members named Nagarwala in a scandal. Dinshawji thinks that Parsis are impaired:

> What days those were year. What fun we used to have …. Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks. (SLJ 1991: 38)

He also holds her responsible for the disharmony in Maharashtra. Dinshawji views it as a loss of social identity and personal history, particularly when the issue of changing of the names of various places and streets were concerned. According to David Williams the lament of Dinshawji suggests:

> In loss of the old name is precisely the loss of the old logo-centric security, that metaphysical reassurance via language… ultimately, he experiences the re-writing of the map of his neighborhood as an interruption in his self-presence. (1995: 217)

To have a life by any other name would mean an acquiescence to cultural alienation, otherness and marginalization.

Dilnavaz says to Dinshawji that Nehru never liked Feroz Gandhi from the beginning. Dinshwaji, who also agrees to her remarks, says: ‘That was tragic. Even today, people say Feroz’s heart attack was not really a heart attack.’ (SLJ 1991: 197)
Thus, the characters like Dilnavaz and Dinshwaji suspect that natural death of Feroz Gandhi the member of their community. This is now Parsi men and women express their feeling of insecurity in *Such A Long Journey*.

Major Bilimoria’s reappearance on the scene of action disturbs the already precarious of Nagarwala case, he makes an important political statement Nagarwala received nearly sixty lake rupees from a bank manager in Delhi allegedly on the strength of a phone – call from the Prime Minister which, it was said, he imitated. Nagarwala was found dead after a few months. Nobody knew where the money went. Since this event involved members of Parsi Community, the Parsis were considerably perturbed and the death of Nagarwala itself raised many eyebrows. Here is a view of a Parsi about the incident:

The Nagarwala incident, because it involved a Parsi, jolted the self – image of the community no less. Having long ago lost their literature to the vandalism of Alexander, the accursed, and their dance, music, art, poetry and even their language to the process of adapting to a new home in India the Parsis have developed a particularized culture called from a mixture of ancient myth and legend overlaid by a life sustaining sense of recent achievement. Gratified to have earned an honorable place in the country of their adoption through their contribution to every field of Endeavour and proud of having retained a strong ethical tradition the Parsis were deeply anguished by the
ambivalent role Nagarwala had played in the sordid story. (Daruwala 1992: 29)

This incident shows that the Parsis do not like the involvement of any member of their community in any scandal, which may bring defame to entire community in general and to the individual in particular.

However, the book is not entirely about an ordinary man and his family. The Parsi world and national issues are interrelated throughout the novel. The wars that the country had to fight during the first few decades after its independence have perturbed the author. There are numerous references to the wars or the events related to wars against the neighboring countries, which serve as historical backdrop. Events like the 1948 Pak invasion on Kashmir, Indo-China war in 1962, Indo-Pak war during 1965 and 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh are weaved in the texture of the novel. For instance Gustad thinks of the year 1962 as:

Such a humiliating defeat, every where people taking of nothing but the way Chinese had advanced, as though the Indian army consisted of tin soldiers or the Government’s in competency for sending brave Indian soldiers with outdated weapons and summer clothing to die in the Himalayas at Chinese hands (SLJ 1991: 9-10)

Dr. Paymaster refers to Lal Bahadur Shastri’s proficiency in Indo-Pak war of 1965 as: ‘The twenty – one day war with Pakistan in which he fared better
than Nehru had in the war with China’ (SLJ 1991: 114) Even Mistry narrates the episode of Shastri’s death through his character, Dr. Paymaster

While the crowds cheered, Shastri boarded a plane for Tashkent where Kosygin had offered to negotiate a peace between India and Pakistan. The night the Tashkent Declaration was signed, Shastri died on Soviet soil, less than eighteen months after he become Prime Minister. Some said he had been killed by the Pakistanis, and others suspected a Russian plot. Some even claimed it was the new Prime Minister’s supporters who poisoned Shastri, so that her father’s dynastic – democratic dream could finally come true. (SLJ 1991: 114)

Now the question arises who is actually responsible for his death? Mistry leaves it to readers to decide. At this stage the receiver of narrative comes in picture. The novel also brings out different idiosyncrasies and ethnocentricities of Parsi Community.

The wars have adversely affected the lives of middle – class in the country and the Parsis as well. The fate of the family is yoked to take of the community and country. Especially the year of war with China was like a nightmare for both the nation and for Gustad. Gustad met with an accident in an attempt to rescue his son. While he was confined to bed ‘The rioting curfew, lathi – charge and burning of buses made his days dreadful’ (SLJ 1991: 311)
The life of the protagonist is interspersed with social and political upheavals. During the rule of Indira Gandhi, Gustad’s fortunes kept on fluctuating. The windowpanes with black out papers still taped on them make the room like the lives of its dwellers, dark and gloomy. The widening gap between Gustad and his son Sohrab, Darius’s friendship with Rabdi’s daughter and Roshan’s increasing illness added to the agony. Major Bilimoria, Gustad’s best companion, who once entertained children with his fascinating tales of the crossing of Banihal Pass, the battle of Baramullah or the siege of Shrinagar disappeared suddenly and later he turned out to be an agent of RAW. ‘Entrapped in an intricate and apparently in extricable share of difficulties’ (SLJ 1991: 215)

As the narrative advances, the news of the arrest of Major Bilimoria and the story of his corruption spread. Bilimoria’s story fictionalizes the Nagarwala conspiracy case of 1971. He, like his real counterpart, finds himself behind the bars, allegedly for misappropriation of money and dies later in imprisonment in obscure circumstances. Mistry, in this sense, reconstructs story waiting to be fold on the margins of historiographical account, although it has been relegated to the periphery or excluded deliberately to please the center of power, and centralizes it in his narrative.(Myles 1994: 199)

On the other end of the spectrum, the country is disenchanted once again, with the rumors of Mrs. Gandhi’s connection with money scandal. Sohrab voices the angst of modern time and youth, ‘our wonderful Prime Minister
uses RAW like a private police force to do all her dirty work.’ (SLJ 1991: 93) He firmly believes that, ‘Only RAW could have done that she made a real mockery of democracy’ (SLJ 1991: 93)

Much to Gustad’s annoyance, he further points out at her son’s misappropriation of money made out of Maruti business to Swiss Bank. He suggests two alternatives,

   Only two choices: communism and military dictatorship, if you want to get rid of these Congress Party crooks. Forget democracy for a few years, not meant for a starving country. (SLJ 1991: 68)

Mistry’s version of history presents two different dimensions. Gustad and Dinshawji belong to an older generation who still has a little faith left in them for the ruling party to improve country’s future. Sohrab and his friend, representing the younger generation, are quick to scrutinize the foulness of politicians with their youthful vigor. In between them is either Dr. Paymaster with his adept views about contemporary politics, or Dilnawaz and Miss Kutpitia, totally ignorant of the political changes. Dr. Paymaster believed that politics, economics, religious problems, domestic strife, all could be dealt with methodically: ‘Observe the symptoms, make the diagnosis, prescribe medicine, and offer the prognosis’ (SLJ 1991: 163)
Mistry has undoubtedly woven together threads of history and social life, for history of a nation is sure to infiltrate into social and personal level and affect the lives of people. In this context Ashley Myles says:

That it serves as a window of human possibility with particular reference to forgotten microscopic community (Myles 1994: 78-79)

Through the characters like Gustad, Dinshawji, Bilimoria, Peerbhoy, Dilnavaz and Miss Kuptitia and a happy combination of Standard English and ‘Parsi Language’ Mistry has incorporated ancient myths with living condition of the Parsi as a community, this has made the novel a social document.

The novel gains its effective strength from interplay of fact and fiction, which place the novel in the category of faction. Pre – occupation with history is an integral aspect of the writer’s intention. The novel as Anita Myles has described.

...... Views and reviews a vast canvas of Indian Life. It discusses minutely and realistically the ups and downs of an average Indian and also touches certain explosive chapters of the India Politics and the three wars that took place between 1962 and 1971. (1994: 174)
The novel emerges as a parallel history of modern India. It is a history of modern India. It is a history from a writer’s point of view that ties to dis / uncover suppressed or neglected chapters of Indian history. Mistry in this context, renarrates the history of his community and country as it has been in the post – Independence era.

It seems that novelist constructs his/story of his community in the novel, which centralizes the Parsi community as a protagonist through its characters. And the country assumes centrality in the narratives of the various characters because the security and prosperity of the community depend on the country’s fate. (Singh 1994: 201)

This re-narration of history in a way depicts consciousness of anxieties and aspirations, perils and problems of existence of individual communal and national issues. Mistry has, in this sense, successfully exploited some historical point of post – Independence era and endeavored to re-think them and re-narrate about his community and country through the various narratives woven in the novel.

*A Fine Balance* spans a period of about 10 years of free India. The design of the story is quite simple. Between its opening chapter *Prologue 1975* and the concluding one, *Epilogue 1984* its 614 pages reveal social as well as historical developments of a country. Set in Indira Gandhi’s India and written with compassion humor, and insight, it is a vivid richly textured and powerful novel written by one of the most gifted writers of our time. The
The novel has sixteen chapters spanning the lives of three main characters over a period of ten years. Though the name of the city in which the novel is set is mentioned nowhere the readers have neither difficulty nor doubt in identifying the “city by the sea” as Mumbai. With the city at the centre Mistry weaves a subtle and compelling narrative about four unlikely characters that come together soon after the government declares a state of Internal Emergency they are aspiring for different pursuits, their fates bring them together to sail under one flag.

*A Fine Balance* of the title of the novel is struck by opening the book with the stoppage of the suburban train service because of suicide by an unidentified character and closing the book with a similar stoppage of train service due to a suicide by one of the main young aspiring characters whose dreams of India are shattered so badly that he decides to commit suicide.

The novel is also the story of the heroic struggle of Dina Dalal a beautiful widow in her forties, Ishwar and Omprakash Darji and Maneck Kohlah, a young student. They are painfully constructing new lives, which become entwined in circumstances no one could have foreseen. Their struggle is to survive a world of segregation, oppression and corruption in which honest work is denied and punished by a totalitarian system. Ishwar and Omprakash, the uncle and nephew who have come to city by the sea (metropolis) primarily to escape the castist oppression imposed on them by the village landlord in their village by River, find work at Dina Dalal’s house as tailors. As the novel advances, circumstances conspire to deny them their modest aspirations. They all discover that there are other forces at
play larger than their individual self. Each faces irrevocable damages. However, despite Maneck’s disappointments and death, the concluding pages confirm the author’s faith in life.

Mistry’s metaphorical unfinished quilt is the central message of the story. Unlike Rushdie’s metaphor of perforated sheet in *Midnight’s Children* or that of the Persian rug in Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, the unfinished quilt does not historicize or philosophize but it stands as an eyewitness of collective human efforts. Dina collects the little pieces of clothes to make quilt. The other three join in at a later stage. Every little piece of cloth is linked with memory at some or the other event like her quilt, the tailor’s chronicle gradually gathers shape. Ishwar, for whom *regret is luxury* which

He could not afford enjoys locating the oldest piece of fabric, moving chronologically, patch by patch, reconstructing the chain of their mishapes and triumphs, till they reached the uncompleted corner (AFB 1995: 385)

Like the fabric piece of the quilt, Mistry has narrated and re-narrated stories of country, culture and communities around a certain point of time and space. Meenakshi Mukherjee believes that all narratives are to be read in the context of specific time and place. But to her,

While the narratives emerge out of a culture, they also contribute towards the construction of definition of this culture.
Stories and communities are thus bound together in a symbiotic relationship (July-Aug: 155)

To her this ability to create community is not only:

An attribute of the epic and the oral tale, but in a less concrete and more ambivalent way one of the major powers of the narrative fiction today (Ibid : 155)

A Fine Balance is made up of three major narratives strands – the stories of Dina, Ishwar and Om and Maneck. The first, third and fifth chapters narrate the past lives of the major characters. The rest of the chapters describe the present. Between The Prologue 1975 and The Epilogue 1984 the novel reveals social and historical developments of a country. The novel progresses through the seemingly separate stories of these major characters after starting on a note of co-incidence. Rohinton Mistry’s narrative moves smoothly between the present and the past that formed the character’s lives and India’s contrasting the illusory hopes of independence with the bitter corruption of a society where justice is sold. Mistry’s work characteristically exposes a contradiction or cluster of tensions embedded within the culture itself as the result of interplay between promises and commitments of the past and reality of the present. In his work, cultural patterns find internalization and adaptation within the stories of the individuals.

In this sense, A Fine Balance offers a synthesis of culture and history. The author’s own sensitivity to history has compelled him to portray the major
intellectual, cultural or political problems of his time. History gets into the novel rather unobtrusively, meandering between different social and cultural consciousness.

Here Mistry deals with the emergency in its own way. Mistry’s insider outsider status enables the readers to view the situation from different angles and has added a political – historical dimension to the novel. The point of view in this novel is that of an omniscient narrator, but there is no explicit intrusion by the author in the narration. However, several characters in the novel can be seen to reveal the author’s set of values, as is evident in their observations and comments. Mistry is skeptical about the declaration of the emergency and centralizes the exclusions of the historiographers. The chronology of the narration makes it obvious. Even, the partition of the subcontinent seems remote, only occasional references are made about it. The author is more concerned with, murder, suicide, Nasality – terrorist killing, police custody death…. The authorial feelings are conveyed distinctly in the epigraph;

Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your soft armchair, you will say to yourself: Perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured; this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true (AFB 1995: epigraph)
Mistry attempts to give a voice to marginalized sections and raises relevant questions. The fictitious accounts of the predicament of the protagonists can be true what happened to Maneck Kohlah, Om or Ishwar could happen to any Indian. A whole arena of Marginalized groups – the Parsis, the Chamaars, the Muslims, the Madari caste, the beggars – share the same novelistic space and produce history by establishing a community or group identity. For them, as one of the characters in the novel utters, ‘Nothing changes. Years pass, and nothing changes.’

Jonathan Culler, in this context, observes that the creation of a nation involves the positing of a history; to be a member of this group is precisely to take certain stories as in some sense your stories, your past. He further says,

Narrative discourse, particularly its structures of address points an imagined community which is much like a nation; in that it consists of people who have no idea of each other actual existence but who are constituted as “we” by the discursive structures of the text (1994: 6)

Mistry, by picking up a cue from Benedict Anderson, who asserts,

Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail…. The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (1996: 7)
Tries to problematize the totalizing concept of nation as well as history and presents subversive accounts to highlight cultural differences. He steers his narrative in desired direction by presenting more than one versions of the same event. For instance, for a common man the emergency is nothing but ‘One more government Tamasha’ (AFB 1995: 5) ‘No consideration for people like us. Murder, suicide ….. Everything ends up delaying the trains’ (AFB 1995: 9)

Those holding some influential post are happy as:

With the Emergency, everything is upside down. Black can be white, day turned into night. With the right influence and a little cash, sending people to jail is very easy. There’s even a new law called MISA to simplify the whole procedure (AFB 1995: 299)

For Dina it is only ‘government problems – games played by people in power’ It does not affect the ordinary people in more than one way. The upper class people were fascinated by the Emergency. For then, it is Magic wand, capable of curing all diseases and decay Mrs. Gupta is in favor of it:

The prime minister’s declaration yesterday of Internal Emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition, along with thousands of trade unionists, students and social workers (AFB 1995: 73)
Dina’s arguments that the court found her (Indira) guilty of cheating in the election does not recede her enthusiasm.

No, no, no! She exclaims that is all rubbish, it will be appealed. Now all those troublemakers who accused her falsely have been put in jail. No more strikes and morchas and silly disturbances. (AFB 1995: 73)

The students are euphoric too, for a different reason. They felt that by following Jaya Prakash Narayana, they could bring radical reforms and would

Invigorate all of society, transform it, form a corrupt, moribund creature into a healthy organism that would, with its heritage of a rich and ancient civilization, and the wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads, awaken the worked and lead the way towards enlightenment for all humanity (AFB 1995: 243)

But students, like Avinash, are aware of the other side of the coin; he educates Maneck;

Three weeks ago the High court found the Prime Minister guilty of cheating in the last elections which meant she had to step down, but she began stalling. So the opposite Parties, student Organizations, trade unions – they started Mass demonstrations across the country all calling for her resignation. Then, to hold on to power, she claimed that the
country’s security was threatened by internal disturbances, and declared a state of emergency (AFB 1995: 245)

All the three protagonists are under constant threat of oppression. Various overlapping episodes display the author’s sympathy for the subdued and his rancor against the oppressive authority. He tactfully portrays the victimization of the four major characters – Dina Dalal, Ishwar, Om Prakash and Manek Kohlah, at the time of emergency. The stories seem separate but enable the author to narrate interactions between different class backgrounds. Dina’s struggle and endurance represents a woman’s plight in the society. Though Maneck and Dina are Parsis, the community does not occupy the centre like the preceding work of Mistry. Nusswan exemplifies both, a male dominance and a false pride of the community. Do you know how fortunate you are in our community? He snaps,

‘Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days, you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto your husband’s funeral pyre, be roasted with him’ (AFB 1995: 52)

Rohinton Mistry has drawn the character of Dina Dalal quite artistically. She is not a woman lie Dilnavaz or her daughter Roshan in Such A Long Journey. She is the woman who needs absolute freedom after her father’s death. She has to accept her brother Nusswan as her guardian but not at the cost of her individual freedom. She does not choose any boy out of several boys, suggested by her brothers. On the contrary to this, she marries Rustom,
the Man of her choice. She has to face hard times when her husband dies in an accident. Even then she does not wish to lose her prized independence. So she does not come to her brother’s house but continues to stay in her husband’s flat independently. She supports herself by obtaining some orders for tailoring clothes. For several years, she struggles a lot. She becomes helpless when the eviction of her flat takes place and has no other place to go to. She comes to her brother Nusswan’s house. At his stage the feminist may argue that by creating the event of Dina Dalal’s coming back to her brother’s House, Mistry here does some injustice to her. It shows that it is difficult for a woman to live independently without any sort of male – protection. Even Beggar master’s a minor character from subplot, protection helped her to live safely for a few more years. But here the fact is that Dina Dalal, like other three protagonists, is disturbed considerably because of the prevailing political situation that is emergency that is why she loses her freedom.

On the other hand Nusswan’s character is portrayed satirically. He is an autocratic figure who thinks that nothing should be undertaken against his wish. He is not at all happy when Dina falls in love with Rustom Dalal and marries him. He fails to understand why his sister so acutely longs for absolute freedom. He manifests in himself all the smugness and hypocrisy of a cunning businessman.

Ishwar and Om belong to the Chamaar caste. The narrative presents a documentary on the Chamaar’s ways of life. Chamaar (“Tanner” from the Sanskrit Charmakara) is a prominent occupational caste in India, Pakistan
and Nepal. Chamaar is a Dalit sub-caste mainly found in the northern states, such as Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi etc. The traditional occupation of this caste was processing, manufacturing and trading in leather and leather goods, but agriculture is another important occupation in which they engage either as owners or as tenants. Traditionally, their social status was low in the Indian caste system because of their association with tanning and thus is still considered as untouchables in some parts of India. These historical details are clearly visible in the novel *The Fine Balance*. Trivial details like how they skin the carcass, eat meat, and tan the hide are dealt with great interest, and touching subtlety. For instance,

And as he mastered the skills….Dukhi’s own skin became impregnated with the odor that was part of his father’s smell

(AMF 1995: 98)

Dukhi Mochi learns to survive with humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions he tries to break the timeless chain of caste by sending his sons to Ashraf to be apprenticed as tailors, and pays dearly for that. The dejected chamaar bemoans:

but what about the major important thing? Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper caste bastards still treat us worse than criminals …
More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to during from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like” (AFB 1995: 142-30)

But much to their agonies, nothing really changes for them. The plight of Ishwar and Om is the same as that of Dukhi and Narayan.

Mistry’s protagonists have little control over circumstances: in other words history happens to them. For instance The Hindu – Muslim not, on the eve of India’s Independence, drags Ishwar and Narayan into confrontation with a crowd while they try to protect Ashraf’s family Om and Ishwar are taken to a labor – camp site a later stage and again Om is an unfortunate victim of forced sterilization drive. His realistic mode of portraying brings to the fore the sordid living conditions of the lower cast people in rural India.

Mistry creates kaleidoscopic image of modern India by portraying individual prototypes Dukhi, Roopa, Radha, Narayana, Ashraf, Ishwar, Om represent the world of subalterns. His characters are both oppressors and oppressed. For instance, when a Bhangi ventured towards the hut of Narayan, Rupa though she herself a Chamaar, rebukes him using the same language as her upper cast oppressors, ‘Where do you think you are going? … I will bathe your filthy skin with the boiling water’ (AFB 1995: 133) She chides her son.

We are not going to deal with such low-caste people. How can you even think of measuring someone who carts the shift from people’s house? (AFB 1995: 133)
A *Fine Balance* attempts to achieve balance between the personal and the general. The text ventures to locate the dives of its characters in a historical context by juxtaposing the personal in relation to the general.

Comparisons have also even made between *A Fine Balance* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* also set in Bombay during the state of emergency, but the two have little in common, Famous for his magic realism, *Midnight’s Children* set amongst the Muslim middle classes, while *A Fine Balance* is very firmly in touch with reality and with the dispossessed a very deliberate decision on Mistry’s part. He has said,

> I don’t think these people have been represented enough in fiction. Most fiction is about the middle class

He is also dismissive of any talk of happy ending.

Given the parameters of my characters’ live, given which 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 outstanding victory in their case: Perhaps there’s a lesson to be learnt here. The expectations that those of us who have grown up in privileged circumstances have of a happy ending is so far beyond the reach of the thousands and thousands of Ishwar’s
and Om’s in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the olds as to be beyond imaging .(website)

Like *Such a Long Journey*, in his novel *A Fine Balance*, also Rohinton Mistry has portrayed a galaxy of characters efficiently and elegantly. By portraying a cross section of Indian society especially those who are called riff-raff, the writer draws the real picture of India. Mistry’s text, like history can be alleged to be incomplete in it, it presents the reality partially and incoherently, leaving many gaps. Guy Lawson rightly parts,

Mistry and Dickens are interested in those to whom history happen those with little control over their circumstances (1998: 22)

Bharucha opines that Mistry’s subalterns do not really speak but their silences are represented through the mediation of Mistry’s narrative. It depicts the plight of common citizens of India. Like the pavement artist of *Such A Long Journey* Mr. Valmik subscribes to the Hindu belief of destiny. The author’s geographical distance from the country of his birth does not come in way of the narrativization of the contemporary reality. His visit to India in 1988 re-vitalized him. Mistry had returned to Mumbai, in the words of his brother: 'To refamiliarize himself with the sights, sounds, smells that would hence forth people in his works' (1991: 11)

Mistry might have flipped through old newspapers and journals and devouring whatever information he got about the state of the country to adumbrate his / story. No wonder his protagonist, Maneck goes through the
same exercise to fill the gap of eight years. Both of his novels (*Such A Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*) stem out from the darker contours of Indian democracy. The earlier work focuses more on the political scams while the later deals with people. The author becomes vocal at times and deprecates or mocks the highest authority;

> At the best of times, democracy is a seesaw between complete chaos and tolerable confusion you see, a democratic omelet is not possible from eggs bearing democratic labels but laid by the tyrannical hen (AFB 1995: 372)

Rohinton Mistry uses same devices as irony, humor; intertextuality to make his narratives effective. For instance, irony or sharp criticism of society is injected into the novel, especially in the conclusion his humor is participative not sneering. Mistry’s metaphorical unfinished quilt is the central message of the story. This is a novel given many too occupational metaphors, so the pattern is not just sheet pattern, but also a pattern of interweaving intermarries and narrative threads. As the quilt is made of patches the reality particularly Indian social reality is made of various patches of different shapes and shades. All those patches put together go into the making of the whole. It becomes suitable metaphor to describe reality in fictional terms.

Mistry’s language is typically the language of a Parsi gentleman. Through he has been living at Toronto in Canada since 1975, his English is very much Indian. Mistry’s version of history has different dimensions. He focuses on
those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. A.K. Singh opines:

The prime aim of the literature is to initiate dialogue where it does not exist, particularly between the people and the communities that share certain geo-social - eco – political and cultural space (1996: 109)

The concluding pages of A Fine Balance bear a clear sign of its author’s contempt the taxi – driver voices its creator:

Same way all her problems started with her own mischief making. Just like in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Assam, Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, she was leaping one group to make trouble for state government …. She gave her blessings to the guns and bombs, and then these wicked, violent instruments began hitting her own government. How do you say in English – all her chickens come home for roasting, Isn’t it? (AFB 1995: 582)

The verbosity of the Taxi – driver speaks of thousands of Indians unspoken thoughts. Undoubtedly the narrative voice in Mistry’s fictional discourse presents an account in the life at the country between 1945 and 1984. His version at history has different dimensions. He focuses on those moment or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.

Family Matters (2002) is Rohinton Mistry’s eagerly anticipated third novel, following the success of his highly acclaimed A Fine Balance (1995), which
won several major literary awards internationally. He in his latest novel confines himself only to the Parsi community that he knows so well and can therefore portray authentically; this novel has received accolades from critics.

Linda L. Richards Remarks:

His most recent novel; Family Matters is brilliant. It manages to be warm and familiar, while for North American readers, at any rate – fragrantly exotic. (2003: Interview)

The novel is set in the city of Mumbai, where Mistry was born and grew up, and tells the story of a middle class Parsi family living through domestic crises. Through one family, Mistry conveys everything from the dilemmas among India’s Parsis, Persian – descended Zoroastrians, to the wider concerns of corruption and communalism. Mistry writes in simple language using a lot of dialogue. Though the novel is very bulky size, it is the most compassionate book of Mistry. He has portrayed the life of a middle class Parsi family of Bombay the focus of the novel has shifted from the 1970s and the years of the Emergency to the more recent times. The Shiv Sena is still around the novel. But the time of the novel is the Post Babri Masjid Bombay.

The novel focuses on the Parsis and it is located in Bombay, in Chateau Felicity, a flat inhabited by a 79 – year old Parkinson’s stricken Nariman Vakeel who is the decaying patriarch and a widower with a small, discordant family consisting of his two middle aged step children; Coomy and Jal. When Nariman’s sickness is compounded by broken ankle Coomy’s
harshness reaches its summit. She plots to turn him round the clock care over to Roxana, her sweet – tempered sister and Nariman’s real daughter and that’s where the problem starts.

Roxana, who lives a contented life with Yezad and her two children (Murad and Jehangir) in a small flat at Pleasant Villa, takes up the care of Nariman like a dutiful daughter, but the inclusion of a new member in an already stuffed house soon becomes evidently painful, both physically and emotionally for Roxana’s family. As loathing for Nariman’s sickness increases and finances of the already strained household go bust, inundated by the ever increasing financial worries Yezad pushes himself into a scheme of deception involving Vikram Kapur.

The first few pages tell of Nariman’s subjection to increasing decay in physical health and stinging insults (revolving around his cost of medicine, lack of space and privacy, the daily routine of bedpans and urinals, sponge baths and bedsores) from his stepdaughter.

Very soon, the focus shifts to Roxana’s household. With Nariman’s inclusion, however, deterioration and decay creep into it. As Yezad comes to centre stage for the following part of the book the author explores the problems faced by an average middle class family financial problems dare him and Jehangir towards greed and money.

The subplot of the book, which involves Yezad hatching a plan to dethrone his employer, is a huge slap on the faces of the corrupt Shiv Sainiks. This
subplot acts as the turning point in the main story. The book contains many details of the Parsis’ practices, rituals, intolerances, and the concerns of native Parsis.

In the epilogue, the youngest of all characters, Jehangir, becomes the narrator, describing the metamorphosis that religion, age, death, and wealth bring to his family.

As the story begins, Coomy who is very bitter and domineering is preparing to have a party for Nariman’s 79th birthday. Roxana and her family are coming over. Coomy is worried by Nariman’s practice of going alone for a walk in the evening. He is beginning to show early signs of Parkinson’s disease and she is afraid he will hurt himself despite his tremors, Nariman likes to go walking. He falls into a hole dug by the telephone company and breaks his ankle, Jal and Coomy cannot cope with the stress and indignity of nursing him. Mistry depicts the theme of suffering through the character of Nariman. He suffers from osteoporosis and hypertension; He does not find peace in Chateau Felicity. Pathetically enough while he is sent to the Pleasant Villa, he still does not find peace.

One can say that Nariman is the embodiment of Parsi community. In his young age he suffered from mentally as his parents were against his will to marry a non Parsi girl, Lucy. On the contrary, he has to marry a Parsi widow. But he could not forget his lady love in his old age and this led him to a miserable life until his death.
One can also interpret the life of Nariman Vakeel as the rise and fall of Parsi Community. Parsi came to India from Persia because of the fear of Arab invaders. But though they are treated well in India, they are vanishing day by day because of late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of death and such other reasons. The death of Nariman Vakeel symbolically indicates the fall of the Parsi community.

According to the Parsis, India is a corrupt country. Mistry exposes the corrupt condition of India in the following line; 'Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest People into crooks.' (FM 2002: 30) Coomy points out the dangers lurking indoors and outdoors. Here she talks about the burning down at an old Parsi couple by rioting Hindu mobs, under the mistaken impression that feeing Muslims had been given shelter in that building. She also points out that Bombay burnt for months after the razing of the mosque in Ayodhya.

How often does a mosque in Ayodhya turn people onto savages in Bombay? Once in a blue moon (FM 2002: 5)

Coomy also talks about the danger that not just Parsi but also the senior citizens of Bombay are experiencing and also killed for the monetary gains Jal says:

Just last week in Firozsha Baug an old lady was beaten and robbed inside her own flat. Poor thing is barely clinging to life at Parsi General (FM 2002: 5)
A part from *A Fine Balance*, this novel does not deal with the political issues and if at all, it interludes through one of the central characters – Yezad Chinoy’s professional life. Nilufer Barucha writes in this regard:

> It is through Yezad that the reader comes in contact with his office attendant Husain the victim of the Past Babri Bombay riots and Mr. Kapur his boss, a victim of the 1947 (Partitioning of India) Hindu – Muslim clashes. (2003: 169)

Husain, a peon of Bombay sporting Goods Emporium is a tragic victim at the Babri – Masjid riot. His wife and children were killed in the riot. Shiv Sena involved in looting and burning the poor and innocent people. Husain describes the incidents in the following words;

> In those riots the police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim Mohallas, they were burning; neighbors came out to throw water and the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody and my poor wife and children……. I couldn’t even recognize them. Mr. Kapur Sympathizes with Hussain and remarks: “Hahn, Hussain, it was shameful. More than three years have passed, and still no justice Shiv Sena polluted the Police. And now Shiv Sena has become the government. (FM 2002: 149)
In an interview with Books rag Rohinton Mistry answered a raised question about the canvas of *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters*. The novelist answered:

*Family Matters* I think has an internal canvas which is as complex as the external canvas of *A Fine Balance*; that is the only similarity I can perhaps point out. But there are concerns, primarily political ones, which both the books share. If you write about Bombay in the mid-90’s especially if you give our characters a political consciousness, it is inevitable that they will sit and talk about what is happening in the city, what is opening in the newspaper (Books Rag Website)

Mr. Kapur recounts to his staff his response to a familiar scene of commuters in Bombay trying to find a foothold on overcrowded trains. Kapur’s intention is to demonstrate the cosmopolitanism and underlying humanity of a Bombay that despite all its fanaticism and corruption, provides a heaven to all those who drift into the city, regardless of cast, ethnicity, or religious affiliation Kapur’s, serves more than a symbolic function:

I never travel by train; I see how crowded they are when I drive pat the tracks. But from the platform that day I saw something new. A train was leaving, completely packed and the men running alongside gave up. All except one. I kept my eyes on him because the platform was coming to an end............”

(FM 2002: 153)
The complex aspects of this daily occurrence become evident later when Kapur attempts to board a train and fails miserably, discovering that travelers are less inclined to help someone who obviously belongs to an affluent class.

Mistry is well aware of the danger of relying too heavily on a social and political realism. He is more concerned about the lives of individual and families, their personal tragedies and social lives than the public world of Shiv Sena fanaticism. However Mistry seeks to create a family realism and a portrait of Community inside larger India. The social and political context is just an instrument of individual change.

Rohinton Mistry describes various features of Bombay in *Family Matters*. He narrates;

> You see how we two are sitting here, sharing? That’s how people have lived in Bombay. That’s why Bombay has survived floods, disease, plague, water shortage, bursting drains and sewers, all the population pressures. In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here. (FM 2002: 152)

Appreciating Bombay, Mr. Kapur says:

> We had to run and we came here but Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with zero, and became prosperous. Only city in the world where this is possible (FM 2002: 145)
Mistry’s love for his old city, Bombay, shines through loud and clear in the words of Mr. Kapur:

Bombay endures because it gives and it receives within this warp and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance, generosity. Anywhere else in the world, in those so-called civilized places like England and America, such terrible conditions would lead to revolution. (FM 2002:152)

These words of high praise for Bombay however, come with a warning against the radical political party, Shiv Sena, trying to gain control of the dynamic city. Mistry has portrayed Bombay city as a protagonist in *Family Matters* and *Such A Long Journey*. In his book, Mistry warns against fatalism: ‘In a culture where destiny is embraced as the paramount force, we are all puppets’ (FM 2002: 154)

*Family Matters* has a variety of themes and one of the interesting themes is that *the child is the father of man*. Here the child concerned is the son of Roxana and Yezad, Jehangir and father is his patriarchal grandfather, Nariman. In the novel, it is Jehangir through whom we come to know about the problems that the family faces. Mistry has used the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle through which the boy tries to solve the quarrels and power politics that shake his family but he finds it is very hard to cohere together in happiness and harmony like the pieces in the jigsaw puzzles.
Some critics believe that Yezad’s character is autobiographical, Mistry also experiences ‘alienation’ like all emigrant Indians. Through the character of Yezad, Mistry expresses his wish to come back to India. At the same time Yezad’s wish for emigrating is symbolical of his quest for prosperity, which also indicates the thirst of Parsi community to achieve economic status for ensuring security in life.

Roxana is devout and sweet-natural wife of Yezad Chenoy and mother of two children Jehangir and Murad. While the stepchildren live with and take care of Nariman in an apartment in the spacious Chateau Felicity building which he has bequeathed to them, Roxana lives with her husband and two sons in a newer apartment, Pleasant Villa, bought by her father.

This is a fact that Coomy is envious and bitter, never stops pointing out. Perhaps it’s because the sprawling seven room palatial apartment is rapidly degenerating, almost parallel to Nariman’s health, while their two-roomed small flat is relatively modern and newly purchased.

Roxana’s husband, Yezad, works at Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium at Marine Lines and has, in the past, eloquently written for permission to emigrate his family to Canada.

Depositing him on a couch in the living room of Chenoys which becomes his home for the next few months, changes the lives of everyone, they struggle, they grow and they learn and they endure. With painstaking detail,
Mistry draws the conflict within each character demonstrating the guilt, compassion, family obligation versus desire for independence and the building of human relationships.

The necessities of Nariman’s care strain Roxana’s relationship with her husband, a warm, witty man saddled with a vicious temper and smoldering disappointments. The Chenoy’s problems multiply. Nariman grows more feeble and bedridden.

Having failed in his attempt to immigrate to Canada, Yezad is struck in a retail job that’s beneath him, his college degree worthless in a world where only computer skills are in demand. Contemptuous of Bombay’s corruption, he finds himself tempted in that direction when his family forgoes meat to pay for his father – in laws medicines.

Yezad is desperate to do something to proceed for his better future and to get rid of poverty. He first tries to convince his boss, Mr. Kapur, to get involved in politics and let him run the store alone. He even hires a couple of actors who pretends to be gangster of the Hindu fundamentalist party Shiv Sena. They threatened Mr. Kapur and barged his office. And also taught him now life in Bombay and gone to worse.

But Kapur merely flies into a rage, and when some real Shiv Sena operatives show up soon afterward with the rather modest demand that he should ratite his ‘Bombay Sports Goods Emporium’ to the ‘Mumbai Sports Goods Emporium’ because Mumbai is being the city’s new nationalistically correct
name. Kapur against goes ballistic and is murdered. His vicious, Icy widow then fires Yezad, and he never finds another Job.

Yezad’s resentment of Nariman occasionally gives way to sadism, as when he refuses to give the old man the bottle he needs to urinate, forbidding his sons to help either. At first Nariman’s son-in-law Yezad resents his children’s proximity to their ailing grandfather;

First they should learn about fun and happiness, and enjoy their youth. Lots of time to learn about sickness and dying (FM 2002: 278)

Yezad is not a bad man, which makes his cruelty all the more painful. But as the novel explores the developing bond between Jehangir and Nariman, Yezad comes to see the truth of Roxana’s belief that this proximity is a good thing;

You should like those are RSS fanatics, trying to blame a saint. Instead of getting upset about the bottle, be glad our children can learn about old age, about caring – it will prepare them for life; make them better human beings (FM 2002 278)

By living with his father in law in cramped quarters for several months, Yezad grows from a moody and resentfully uninvolved husband to a sweet and caring son to Nariman. He comments on the beauty of helping the elderly find comfort in their deaths:
Strange trip, this journey toward death no way of knowing how much longer for the chief …. a year two years? But Roxana was right, helping your elders through it – that was the only way to learn about it and the trick was to remember it when your own time came ……… (FM 2002: 347)

Mistry’s descriptions of Nariman’s flattery mind and body are sobering, not least for the impact his failing health has on those around him, Commy and Jal

Were bewildered and indignant, that a human creature of blood and bone, so efficient in good health, could suddenly become so messy….. Sometimes they took it personally, as though their stepfather had reduced himself to this state to harass them” (FM 2002: 68)

Roxana, on the other hand, quotes Gandhi’s message: ‘That there was nothing nobler than the service of the weak, the old, the unfortunate’ (FM 2002: 72)

Mistry has an amazing way of setting up ordinary lives scarred by tragedy, then illuminating them with moments of merciful beauty. He writes simply, but by accumulating the small details. Of his characters existence, he creates a visceral feel for their loves, humiliations and little victories. A scene where Yezad overcome with sympathy, decides to trim his father – in – law’s nails
and shave his face becomes a quite redemption. In the short term, having to take in Nariman threatens to tear Roxana’s family apart. But in the long term, living up to their responsibilities transforms not only their morals but their fortunes. Yezad rediscovers his lost religion, becoming a regular worshipper at the fire-temple. The story moves to a close on a surge of pious sentiment Yezad is now a Parsi fundamentalist and bigot, prepared to act against Murad, if he tries to date a non-Parsi exactly as Nariman’s family acted against him. Earlier on, Mistry seemed strangely to muffle the conflict between religions as Nariman experienced it, enemy of joy killer of impulse, and as Yezad rediscovered it, as bringer of peace and prosperity. Yezad’s return to religion is presented in terms of timelessness, peace and comfort, he perceives his Zoroastrianism as ‘encoded in blood and bone.’ (FM 2002: 297)

Yet the novel makes the readers all too aware of the destructive aspects of religious belief as well. The Parsis, followers of an ancient Persian religion, were in Colonial days an influential and highly respected minority in India. *Family Matters* addresses the dwindling of their cultural dominance despite the efforts of people like Nariman’s father who refuse to let their children intermarry.

Just like many other Parsi novelist Rohinton Mistry has touched this reality of Parsi community: ‘No Inter Faith Marriages’ when economical tragedy is prevented, Jal decides to set right the sabotaged ceiling and invites his stepfather back home. He did so because he is unable to restore the financial difficulty. But unfortunately the ray of his life, Coomy dies and now he
completely soaked in repentance. He invites with him. The Chenoys sell their apartment. Eventually Nariman dies. When he was on his deathbed, he was surrounded by his family and also daisy arrived to fulfill a promise she made years before that she would play the violin for him as he lies dying.

The Jobless, disappointed Yezad turns into a Parsi fanatic, pouring over sacred texts round the clock and praying at the fire temple, cursing his sons as they become more secular westernized and eager to cuddle with non-Parsi girls. Roxana grits her teeth, pours her love out on everyone and keeps peace in the family. Jal, now benign, clueless Uncle fiddles with his hearing aid and watches from the sidelines.

Not all of the characters in the Novel are Parsis, but there’s a sense that those who can enjoy a qualified exemption from the full chaos of Bombay. Yezad’s employer is an ecumenical Hindu, a born and bred Bombayvala’ who sees himself as inoculated against attacks of outrage, but in his attempts to surrender to the spirit of his city he experiences only intimidation and thuggery. A salesman at the Book Mart next door has a sideline as a scribe, reading and writing letters for the illiterate. The full misery of India breaks over him like a wave, with all its paradoxical accompanying dignity. One man, who has just heard of his brothers’ death killed for a relationship across cast lines – refuses to have the reading fee waived since it would cheapen the death to hear it for fee. The book’s minor characters are often doctrinaire in their diagnoses.
Little white lies are as pernicious as big black dies. When they mix together, a great grayness of ambiguity descends; society is cast adrift in an amoral sea…… (FM 2002: 348)

A family that belongs to a racial religion is certainly some sort of special case. There is plenty of anthropological information in family matters about Zoroastrians – rituals of sandalwood and brazier quire beliefs about the cosmic significance of the cat, the cock and the spider. The most engaging pages are those where elderly Parsis, resigned to the decline of the sect which ‘built this beautiful city’ and ‘made it prosper’, discuss fantastical remedies for the low birthrate. Since educated people have smaller families, one proposes cash incentives for Parsis to study less. Etc are vividly described Mistry has once again shown that Parsi life with all its idiosyncrasies and peculiarities is full of stories with universal appeal as it is rich in human texture. The author understands and portrays his human texture in colour and style. *Family Matters* was as well received internationally as its predecessors, nominated once again for the Man Booker. It also won the Kiriyaman Pacific Rim Book Prize.

Many critics compare Rohinton Mistry’s writing to 19th century novelists from Dickens to Tolstoy. But Mistry himself answered to his query he said:

I enjoy that kind of writing and that period as much as anything else. People often mention Dickens and Tolstoy in connection with my work but it is not as though I have undertaken any special study of their work. The only Dickens I had read till I
took night classes in Toronto was in high school; I think we read Oliver Twist and an excerpt from A Christmas Carol. At university, I remember reading hard times, Great Expectations, David Copperfield and I think that it, really, I have not undertaken any special study, nor am I particularly drawn to these authors. In fact, if I were to choose my favorites, what I enjoy most, they would probably include some American writers, like Cheever, saul Bellow Bermard Malamud, and Updike of course I do enjoy Chekhov and Turgenev - these 19th century writers but I do not have any special attachment to that period but I’m not an expert in all this so if the critics thing my writing is Dickensian or Tolstoyan. I will thank them and say I am flattered. (Linda 2003: Interview)

It can be said that *Family Matters* is a good novel. The dialogues are great the relationships are totally perfect. There is more or less a happy ending after lots of troubles. The Epilogue which is presented by Jehangir, now fourteen that flashed five years forward to show how the people were all doing. There is also a lot to be learned about the culture of the Parsi and the religion of Zoroastrianism from this great book.
References


(The subsequent references to the novel *A Fine Balance* are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as AFB).


(The subsequent references to the novel *Family Matters* are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as FM).


(The subsequent references to the novel *Such A Long Journey* are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as SLJ).


Myles Ashley E. *Allan Sealy’s The Trotter Nama: A Critical Evaluation*; Recent Indian Fiction; ed. R. S. Pathak New Delhi Prestige; 1994.


Article


Websites

www.amazon.ca

http://www.curledup.com/familymahtive (Asia society Org/arts/literature/rohinton mistry family matters and literary ones)

(The Book Reviews by Sonia Chopra, 2002 http://www.curledup.com/familymahtive)

Linda Richards L., *January Profile; Rohinton Mistry* Interview at www.amazon.ca, March2003