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Historicizing the personal: A new historicist reading of Rohinton Mistry's such a long journey

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Rohinton Mistry's novel Such a Long Journey through a New Historicist framework, illustrating how personal experience and historical discourse intersect within postcolonial India. Set in 1970s Bombay, the narrative reflects the socio-political turbulence of the period. Through the Parsi protagonist, Gustad Noble, the novel presents an alternative history that reveals how local, national, and geopolitical pressures shape the diminishing fortunes of his family and the wider Parsi community. The study investigates how history emerges through personal consciousness, domestic spaces, and everyday encounters, demonstrating how official nationalist and developmental narratives often sideline marginalized voices. By situating the novel alongside relevant historical "co-texts," the analysis deepens understanding of its representations of state surveillance, corruption, and authoritarian governance. It further shows how the text challenges official histories by foregrounding everyday struggles and overlooked perspectives. Emphasizing conflict, contradiction, and contextual complexity, this research highlights the instability of fixed interpretations. It foregrounds subversive or repressed voices and shows how literature can recover "submerged histories." Aligned with the principles of New Historicism, the study critiques dominant ideologies, interrogates power relations embedded in discourse, and positions the novel as a cultural artifact that simultaneously resists, critiques, and reflects hegemonic structures in historically grounded ways.

Contribution/ Originality: This study offers an original contribution by analyzing Rohinton Mistry's novel Such a Long Journey through a New Historicist perspective. It highlights how personal narratives contest official histories, offering fresh insights into state power, marginalization, and the novel's role as a cultural critique of postcolonial India.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to Such a Long Journey: Critical Acclaim and Depiction of 1970s India

Rohinton Mistry achieved recognition within the literary realm following the release of his debut novel, *Such a Long Journey*, which received immediate international acclaim. The work was honoured with the Governor General's Award for English fiction in Canada in 1991 and the Commonwealth Prize in 1992. Furthermore, it was nominated for the Booker Prize in 1991. Through a realistic narrative style, Mistry depicts the varied fortunes of Gustad Noble, a compassionate middle-aged Parsi with modest aspirations. In addition to capturing the communal life of the Parsis

in post-Independence India, the novel also illustrates the socio-political and cultural upheaval that occurred during the 1960s and early 1970s.

In *Such a Long Journey*, Rohinton Mistry expresses his sentiments regarding Indian leaders through fictional characters who reflect aspects of his background. He intricately weaves the powerful emotions of these characters, which makes the factual depiction of historical events even better. The narrative engages with the 1971 Nagarwala Conspiracy case, wherein Sohrab Nagarwala was imprisoned and subsequently murdered following directives from the highest authorities. Major Bilimoria, a Parsi gentleman featured in the novel, serves as a representation of Mr. Nagarwala. Mistry's work brings the Parsi community back to life while also showing compassion for all marginalized Indians, regardless of their faith. It does this by showing how systemic corruption and authoritarian rule were during the Emergency and criticizing Indira Gandhi's role in political corruption.

From a New Historicist perspective, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* combines historical events with a distinct vision of Indian history. Mistry discusses topics such as the Nagarwala Scam, the Emergency, and the impact of right-wing groups on politics, often weaving these into compelling stories. The fundamental question of the study is to explore what Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* reveals about personal consciousness, marginalization, and historical discourse in postcolonial India when examined through a New Historicist perspective. Additionally, the study aims to analyze how the novel's portrayals of domestic space, surveillance, and corruption challenge official nationalist ideologies and prevailing narratives. Drawing on Foucault and Greenblatt's New Historicism, the main objective is to illustrate the function of fiction as a cultural artifact in critiquing, resisting, and reflecting on hegemonic structures through engagement with historical "co-texts."

1.2. Overview of New Historicism: Interconnections of Literature, History, and Culture

Various critical methods emerged in the postmodern era, especially in literary criticism. New Historicism, a recent approach, departs from conventional literary analysis. It asserts that a literary work must be interpreted as a product of its temporal, geographical, and historical context. The term "New Historicism" refers to the methodologies employed by scholars, primarily in Renaissance studies, during the 1980s and earlier periods. Academics linked to this idea employed terminology such as "Critical Historicism," "Historical Materialist Criticism," and "Cultural Poetics."

Stephen Greenblatt presented new historicism in the early 1980s, drawing on the ideas of post-structuralists including Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Clifford Geertz. This method is essential for understanding how literature and history interact with each other. New Historicism blurs the barriers between the two by combining political, cultural, and historical studies with ideas from philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. New Historicism, influenced by Foucault, perceives literature as influenced by power systems, acting as an agent of power within society, while examining whether literary works promote or challenge dominant ideologies. Unlike traditional historicism, which views history as a backdrop, New Historicism argues that literary texts and historical events mutually shape each other. Proponents claim that history is a constructed narrative shaped by political and cultural biases, not just a collection of facts.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study places the novel in 1970s Bombay, examining its reflection of socio-political turmoil from Parsi Gustad Noble's perspective.

1. The study aims to explore Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* through the lens of New Historicism.
2. Critically evaluate the novel's portrayal of alternative history by examining local, national, and geopolitical influences on the Parsi community and the protagonist's family legacy.
3. To explore how individual consciousness, as well as domestic environments, shape history by contrasting official nationalist ideologies that suppress protesting voices.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research and New Historicism to analyze the novel. The method involves in-depth textual analysis within the socio-political and historical context of 1970s Bombay. The method examines how literature, history, and power intersect. It focuses on how the novel shows and criticizes dominant ideas, state authority, and opinions that are not often heard. The novel serves as the primary data source, with secondary sources comprising academic texts on New Historicism, postcolonial theory, and the political history of India. The methodology involves careful reading to identify narrative elements that reveal personal consciousness, domestic life, surveillance, and corruption. The focus is on protagonist Gustad Noble's experiences and Parsi heritage to highlight alternative and subaltern perspectives.

The study employs critical discourse analysis to examine power and authority within the narrative. It references theorists such as Foucault and Greenblatt to contextualize the research. This approach facilitates a critical evaluation of *Such a Long Journey* as a cultural artifact and historical discourse, highlighting its significance in postcolonial scholarship.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is relevant to literary and socio-political fields. The significance of this article lies in its examination of Rohinton Mistry's novel *Such a Long Journey* within the framework of New Historicism. The study offers a comprehensive examination of how the text interacts with competing historical narratives at both national and local levels. The article analyzes the marginalized Parsi community's voice, portrayal of political events, and diasporic identity. The study explores its interactive relationship with mainstream historical discourses through the ideas of power, ideology, and counter-memory, despite the limited scholarly work on this subject. The study highlights the influence of individual consciousness and everyday environments in constructing history. The inclusion of these makes the novel a cultural artifact that challenges dominant power structures. Ultimately, the research makes a substantial contribution to both literary criticism and postcolonial historical analysis by offering a nuanced interpretation of power, identity, and resistance in contemporary Indian literature.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1. Concepts and Principles of New Historicism

Nietzsche (2002), a German philosopher, examines the impact of historical awareness on modern philosophy, history, and culture in his work, *Beyond Good and Evil*. He refers to this as a "sixth sense" to emphasize its role in shaping understanding and interactions with the world (p.114). Nietzsche views history as more than scholarship; it is a vital perspective on life, revealing how past cultures shape present behavior and thought. This highlights that knowledge shapes cultural development, supporting his critique of modern society. For twentieth-century writers, understanding history was crucial. However, many historians view historical accounts as inadequate due to limited scope, leading to two main approaches: Old Historicism and New Historicism. New Historicism sees literature and history as interconnected texts, rejecting strict separation, while Old Historicism sees them as text and context. The views of older schools that saw literature as mirroring a single epoch's worldview, New Historicism argues that cultures are internally diverse and not uniformly homogeneous.

New Historicism emerged as a literary approach in the early 1980s. Greenblatt (1982) popularized the term 'New Historicism' in his preface to a special issue of *Genre*, Vol. 15 (1982). New Historicism, like all theories of literary criticism that incorporate elite perspectives from previous critiques, primarily arises from concepts and ideas of scholarly analysis and interpretation assimilated from diverse post-structural theorists. Tracing the origin and popularity of the theory, Wilson (2007) asserts that, having emerged in this context, new historicism and the broader forms of historicist study, which have migrated across various disciplines in the arts and humanities, have thrived within the academic community. Simultaneously, interest in "theory" has diminished since the 1990s (p.161).

Stephen Greenblatt, a seminal figure in New Historicism, conducts an in-depth examination of the construction of selfhood within prominent English Renaissance literary figures. He opines that the emergence of new identity problems significantly influenced early modern literature, as articulated in his work, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. He underscores the dependence of literature on its socio-historical context, characterizing New Historicism as a critical practice that investigates how literary texts are "embedded in the material practices of the culture" in which they were created (Greenblatt, 2012). He describes New Historicism as a shift from a critique focused on "verbal icons" to emphasizing cultural artifacts, thereby highlighting the interrelatedness of historical and literary analysis (Greenblatt, 2012). Greenblatt asserts that New Historicism should not be regarded as a theory, but rather as a collection of interpretive practices that analyze how texts dialectically reflect societal behavior patterns and either perpetuate, shape, or alter their prevailing codes.

In his essay *Professing the Renaissance*, Louis A. Montrose describes this approach as a historical renaissance that surpasses the linguistic emphasis of poststructuralism. He emphasizes New Historicism's twin focus on "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Veeser, 1989). New Historicism counters ahistorical approaches, rekindling interest in the particular social and political contexts that envelop literary works (Baldick, 2014). Porter (1988) notes that New Historicism emerges from various existing practices and is rooted in the work of several prominent thinkers, including Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson, Raymond Williams, Mikhail Bakhtin, Terry Eagleton, and Hayden White (pp. 743–49). The prominence of New Historicism burgeoned during the 1980s, originating in Raymond Williams' work, Marxism and Literature, which stimulated the historicization of literary studies in England and America. The ideas and concepts of literary analysis and interpretation proposed by poststructuralist theorists serve as the primary sources of inspiration for New Historicism. This includes the Marxist ideology propounded by Louis Althusser, the discourse and power dynamics explored by Michel Foucault, the fundamental concepts of deconstructive criticism, and the anthropological arguments presented by Clifford Geertz. These theorists believe that various external cultural elements and discourses, which interpret actions, events, and concepts within a cultural context, shape human identity. Their investigations assert that individual belief and cultural discourse mutually influence one another, rather than cultural discourse solely determining interpretation and meaning. They also argue that thoughts and ideas exist as mental constructions and embodied behaviors, with each expressive act situated within material practices (Klages, 2015).

Gallagher and Greenblatt (2001) underline the considerable challenge associated with defining New Historicism and delineating its areas of focus, given that no "editorial statement... staking out... (their) theoretical position" was ever published for *Representations* (p. 4), the academic journal most closely associated with New Historicist studies. Fox-Genovese asserts that *Representations* "brings together historians and literary critics in a colorful carnival of cultural readings and thick descriptions"(Veeser, 1989). Abrams and Harpham (2009) identify several spheres of critical theory that intersect with the objectives of New Historicism, encompassing Marxist criticism, discourse analysis, deconstructive criticism, dialogic criticism, and feminist criticism (pp. 222–223). In conjunction with traditional historical subjects, New Historicism emphasizes marginalized narratives and prioritizes matters concerning private life in its historical inquiries (Tyson, 2006).

6. DISCUSSION

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* questions and often rejects colonizer narratives, engaging with postcolonial institutions and societal stories. Mistry challenges dominant accounts of historical figures and independence, blending fact, fiction, rumor, and gossip. His works differ from traditional Indian English literature, providing a unique, fact-based narrative fiction. By taking *Such a Long Journey* as evidence, the study validates that history is a political act, aligning with postmodern critiques of historical materialism. The novel, following postmodernist theory, dismisses a single, all-encompassing historical narrative. It emphasizes diverse perspectives and the conditional nature of history to explore marginalized voices in the postcolonial era. The study will analyze

how Mistry, like postmodernist historians emphasizing facts and skepticism, views history as a political act. It will examine how the novel challenges the idea of historical material as purely objective truth. It will also explore how the novelist's stance seems to align with Foucault's critique of history: "The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a potent and continuous development must be systematically dismantled" (Foucault, 1980).

6.1. Social Discourses and the Parsi Identity

Such a Long Journey depicts Parsi life, customs, and their role in India, highlighting community concerns. Historically, Parsis have integrated into India, coexisting peacefully and contributing while preserving their culture. Mistry's primary objective in the novel is to showcase their rich heritage and minority status through resistance and questioning. To this end, Bhautoo-Dewnarain (2007) observes: "Mistry recognizes religion and rituals as key in shaping human identity. His fiction highlights individuals facing tensions between past and present, self and community, family, and society. Religious practices define ethnic and communal identity, emphasizing differences and intensifying conflicts" (p. 25).

Such a Long Journey describes the Parsis as historical agents who thrived under colonial patronage and subsequently endured marginalization following the country's independence. During British colonial times, the community's wealth came from reformist zeal and entrepreneurship, but it could not last after the colonies were freed. Zoroastrianism, closely tied to the significant history of the Parsi community, holds a progressive and reformist view that incorporates Western rationalist ideas about religion and society (Palsetia, 2001). Wadia resonates with the frustrations of communities with the existing status quo, asserting: "A small community like ours can escape the process of decadence and degeneration if it has the art of rejuvenating itself from within" (Luhrmann, 1996). He articulates concerns regarding the community's inclination to become overly absorbed in notions of past glory and greatness, commenting, "The community seems to have exhausted its possibilities of cultivating leaders capable of courageously and empathetically overcoming the limiting influence of its stagnant history" (Luhrmann, 1996). The Parsi lifestyle is complicated by the decline of Nehruvian ideals and the rise of authoritarianism, characteristic features of the Indira Gandhi regime. The novel explores "group polarization and other prevailing national challenges" (Rao, 1994), which in turn heightens the community's apprehensions about its future. The novel portrays Parsi identity as both a site of resistance and a victim of postcolonial shifts across social, religious, historical, and political discourses. It chronicles the community's successes and declines while exploring how the process of nation-building marginalizes minorities.

From a New Historicist perspective, *Such a Long Journey* vivifies how personal and collective memories contest official narratives. These memories reveal tangled debates over identity in postcolonial India. Through its depiction of economic reforms, bureaucratic authority, and urban decline, the novel explores the ideological foundations of India's postcolonial social discourses and their influence on the Parsi minority. The novel challenges nationalist assertions that state interventions are invariably emancipatory. It emphasizes the historical crisis of these events and their uneven distribution. The novel embodies the New Historicist perspective that literature and history mutually shape each other, reclaiming minority experiences as key sites of historical and cultural contestation. The novel illustrates how social discourses on bank nationalization, bureaucracy, and democracy influence and threaten the Parsi community's identity, highlighting the unequal impacts of nation-building on the Parsi minority groups.

The novel critically examines Indira Gandhi's economic protectionism and the nationalization of banks. These measures represent ideological acts with significant cultural implications. Mrs. Gandhi's shift towards protectionism in the late 1960s was driven more by political expediency than genuine conviction, marking a stark contrast with the liberalization occurring concurrently in East Asia (Guru, 2016). Within the novel, this ideological shift is movingly illustrated through Dinshawji's heartfelt lament. He says, "Back then, Parsis dominated the banking industry… Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks…" (Mistry, 1991). This complaint reflects not just nostalgia but a sense of

betrayal by the postcolonial state. The Parsi identity, tied to financial acumen and respectability, becomes fragile as the state redefines economic hierarchies in the context of social justice. The novel shows that purportedly equitable economic reforms displaced the influence of elite minorities.

The Bombay of the 1970s reveals moral and civic decay, as propaganda and corruption disillusion the middle class. As the novel is set in the same period, it invariably discusses how state power seeps into the nuances of private life through bureaucracy. The Noble family's involvement in refugee relief, fundraising, and paper drives reveals how civic duties legitimize state power at the cost of individual autonomy. The narrative critiques the illusion of democratic participation: characters resort to petitions, ballot boxes, or the judiciary (Mistry, 1991), but these channels offer only limited agency in a political system that is increasingly unresponsive and coercive. The novel vividly depicts urban life, water shortages, rationing, and bureaucracy, exemplifying how political ideologies impact daily life. It transforms Bombay into a microcosm of postcolonial disillusionment, where the middle-class Parsi faces uncertainty, caught between memory and alienation (Kamlani, 2013). Gustad Noble's exhaustion shows how nationalism and modernization reshape minority identities while eroding trust and community cohesion.

Such a Long Journey offers a nuanced view of the Parsi community's identity in postcolonial India, with its discussion of the placement of religious rituals, such as funeral rites, within the context of modernization and urbanization. It shows how debated traditions become sites for negotiating power between reformists and orthodox views, and where cultural memory conflicts with modernist demands. The ceremonies following Dinshawji's death highlight the novel's critique of postcolonial social discourses that shape minority self-perception. As Bharucha (2003) observes, Mistry "revives the distinctive Parsi custom of exposing the dead in the Towers of Silence," a practice that has already been compromised by environmental and societal modifications (2013, p. 137). Rather than viewing the rite through an ethnographic lens, the narrative explores it in the context of displacement and ideological disintegration. Dinshawji's wife improperly conducted the Sagdid ritual, exemplifying how contemporary education and metropolitan lifestyles have diminished communal wisdom and spiritual cohesion.

The conflicts between orthodox and reformist Parsis in the novel illustrate how tradition and modernity can serve as means to characterize a community. Reformist voices claim that traditional funeral customs are outdated and incompatible with rational, progressive communities, aligning with secular-nationalist development ideas. Besides, the ecological basis for using vultures to consume flesh is now invalid due to the presence of high-rise buildings in Bombay and declining vulture populations. Gustad supports religious experts and cultural memory as sources of ecological and spiritual knowledge, which are under attack by Western rationalism and government programs. This ideological split reveals how power influences the community and how external postcolonial forces and internal debates alter Parsi identity. The Dakhmas are the places where Parsis expose dead bodies to sunlight so birds of prey can consume the flesh. Deterioration and disputes over remains in the Towers of Silence (The Dakhmas) highlight a shift from sacred continuity to a contentious tradition. According to New Historicist critics, cultural practices are not eternal but are continually constructed and questioned within power networks (Greenblatt, 2012). Moreover, development projects taking over holy sites reveal how the state's rational view of urban space marginalizes minority practices, transforming sacred ecosystems into sites of memory and loss. The dynamic mirrors how postcolonial India reshapes minority self-perceptions. The novel's narrative establishes this by incorporating Parsi funerary rituals into debates on modernization, environmental damage, and reform.

Such a Long Journey offers a deep New Historicist analysis of how social and political discourses shape the construction of Parsi identity in postcolonial India. Through Gustad Noble's experiences, the novel reveals how a once-prosperous community faces pressures as it grapples with marginalization, cultural uncertainty, and the loss of social relevance. The narrative becomes a site where personal memory intersects with collective history. It allows the novelist to critique dominant nationalist frameworks that overlook minority voices. The text exposes the complex power relations that define identity formation within a nation in flux by juxtaposing loyalty and dissent, belonging and alienation. In the end, the novel brings back the Parsi experience as an essential counter-narrative that cannot be

erased. It shows the emotional and intellectual struggles of a community trying to survive in a world that is constantly changing.

6.2. Power and Its Mechanisms

Such a Long Journey portrays the manifestation of power in daily life, both institutionally and diffusely, through the lens of New Historicism. It explores the relationship between "self, community, place, and identity," as Dodiya (2004) correctly points out, thereby validating local experience while illustrating how it is formulated and limited by dominant ideological forces (2004, p. 2). The novel presents a society in which rumors, surveillance, and repression primarily restrict individual agency and influence personal identity, extending beyond mere minor anxieties.

The narrative reveals the state's coercive authority during Indira Gandhi's era, marked by growing authoritarianism and centralization. The inescapable atmosphere of suspicion within the text reflects the depression of the Emergency period, during which even acts of protest were considered threats to state control. The eventual exclusion of *Such a Long Journey* from the University of Mumbai curriculum in 2010, resulting from pressure exerted by the far-right Shiv Sena (Burke, 2010), exemplifies the enduring impact of political censorship and cultural regulation. The novel criticizes the power structures that suppress, change, and control literature that is similar to historical events to keep stories going. Ironically, that very act is an example of those structures, which ultimately become a footnote in history. The novel promotes resistance by showing how power works across times, institutions, and relationships, quietly, without using direct protest language.

The novel exposes and questions political power, historical revisionism, and cultural marginalization. It offers an alternative view of Indira Gandhi's early 1970s era, marked by authoritarianism, centralized power, and manipulation of democracy. Instead of just recounting history, it creates a counter-discourse challenging official narratives. As noted by Bakshi (2013), the narrative aims to "rewrite the history of a scam that involved a Parsi banker," intending to restore the community's damaged moral reputation. (2013, p. 92). By undertaking this action, the novelist not only defends the Parsis' cultural heritage but also criticizes the state's fabrication and distortion of the truth to maintain political authority. The Nagarwala case, in which a purported Parsi accomplice was falsely implicated in a financial scandal, is revisited to illustrate the corruption within Indira Gandhi's administration, thereby diminishing the credibility of the "official version" of events (Bakshi, 2013).

The narrative shows power coming from sources like the media, government, banks, and community conversations. Newspapers are key for interpreting and sharing history, often curated by the state. Gustad Noble, both a subject and an interpreter, engages with these texts, and his declining status highlights how power can suppress citizens, forcing them to be silent witnesses to oppression. Daily conversations and public spaces, such as Gustad's talks with Dinshawji, allow people to voice concerns about identity and the neglect of authority. Violent groups like Shiv Sena, supported by Hindutva ideology, show political violence and authoritarianism becoming normal. Minority groups like Parsis, Jews, and Christians are often excluded due to bureaucratic neglect and Hindutva influence. The focus on the Bangladesh Liberation War links local struggles to global events, showing how ordinary lives are affected during turbulent times. The novel goes beyond nostalgia or personal loss, acting as a literary intervention that challenges dominant narratives through cultural memory.

The 1971 Nagarwala case, the infamous chapter in Indian history, is featured in the novel. In this notable case, an individual impersonated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and unlawfully withdrew 6 million rupees from the State Bank of India, exposing systemic corruption and the way power operates through secrecy, surveillance, and official narratives. It revealed flaws in institutions such as banks, the secret services, and the Prime Minister's Office. The accused, Captain Rustom Sohrab Nagarwala, claimed to be a patriot of the Bangladesh Liberation Movement. His links to RAW and military background raised questions about the state's involvement. Indira Gandhi's unclear role shows how state power is influenced through actions and information control. The subsequent rapid trial and Nagarwala's mysterious death in custody fueled widespread speculation about political cover-ups and conspiracy

theories, contributing to doubts over the validity of official accounts (Hariom, 2025). By rendering this event fictional within *Such a Long Journey*, Rohinton Mistry transforms the novel into a counter-historical discourse. Mistry became interested in this event after hearing family members discuss the scandal, particularly emphasizing the shock experienced by the Parsi community (Lambert, 2002). The disbelief that "a Parsee could have done such a thing" reflects community shame and the symbolic loss of a minority's moral authority, built during colonialism and fading in the postcolonial era.

The novel demonstrates how power operates through political actions and narratives. This concept closely aligns with Michel Foucault's idea of power as pervasive, systemic, and embedded in daily interactions. The novel critically examines Hindu nationalism's influence on marginalized groups, such as the Parsis, and illustrates how politics shape cultural identity and history. Characters like Dinshawji, Tehmul, and Major Bilimoria serve as voices of dissent, showing how exclusion from the national conversation affects individuals' emotions and thoughts. Their pain disrupts the story's linear flow, aligning with Stephen Greenblatt's perspective of the New Historicist approach: to "read history as a text" (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2001) and understand how literature functions as a space where lived experience and official ideology intersect. The novel challenges idealized portrayals of figures like Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru by illustrating how they contributed to the creation of a postcolonial nation-state that often relied on force rather than inclusion to achieve its goals. Wadhawan (2014) states that Mistry "tears down the pedestal occupied by Indira Gandhi," exposing the control methods that replace Nehruvian democratic ideals (2014, p. 65). The novel critiques selective national history memory, showing diminished respect for Mahatma Gandhi, a Parsi, and exposing government corruption. The claims of economic justice through national policies like bank nationalization of 1969 are understood as a use of the state's authority that was detrimental to communities like the Parsis.

Foucault's assertion that power constructs knowledge and defines the boundaries of truth is particularly significant in this context, as the novel presents alternative versions of history that challenge prevailing political myths. The sentiments of betrayal and marginalization experienced by the Parsi characters are not merely emotional; they are embedded within a broader framework of exclusion, whereby their historical contributions are disregarded in favor of nationalist objectives. Selling donated war relief in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar reveals how patriotism can conceal government corruption, rendering the sacred profane. According to Greenblatt, literary works are both shaped by and influence the cultural forces of their respective eras. In this context, the novel plays the role of re-visioning history. It challenges the individuals who held power and the political, cultural, and narrative frameworks that sustained their authority. Through this approach, the novel challenges the official history of postcolonial India, highlighting how power constructs consensus, suppresses dissent, and defines the boundaries of belonging.

In *Such a Long Journey*, Major Bilimoria reinterprets the Nagarwala case to explore how state power operates secretly, aligning with Foucault (1995)'s view that power is not only repressive but also constructive (p. 194). It influences knowledge, manages discourse, and establishes what is considered legitimate. The novel blurs the distinction between history and fiction to critique how the Indian government employs secrecy and surveillance to maintain power. It is a fictional portrayal of Capt. Rustom Sohrab Nagarwala. The novel deliberately omits historical figures such as P. N. Haksar and the unnamed Chief Cashier, focusing solely on the Prime Minister. This is a Foucauldian approach that illustrates how power becomes deeply personal within governance structures, often embodied by charismatic or authoritarian figures, such as Indira Gandhi. Applying Foucault's (1995) concepts of the "author-function" and the "regime of truth" in the novel reveals that Indira Gandhi is represented not merely as a historical figure but also as the central element in a broader discourse on manipulation and authority. Intelligence agencies such as the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) are employed to monitor opposition groups and suppress dissent, becoming increasingly intimate and less transparent. The novel critiques sanitized histories that omit minority views and avoid holding leaders accountable, exemplified by Nagarwala's fictional character Major Bilimoria, portrayed as both an agent and a victim working for RAW.

To understand the novelist's narrative style, it is essential to consider Stephen Greenblatt's concept that literature constitutes a form of "cultural poetics," a domain that is both influenced by and influential upon the prevailing ideas of its era (Vermeulen, 2010). *Such a Long Journey* not only mirrors historical events but also reconstructs history through active reinterpretation, giving voice to previously silenced and discredited groups and offering an alternative perspective to the official state record. The novel illustrates how constitutional authority becomes entangled with secret operations and personal grudges, revealing the fragile foundations of postcolonial democratic systems. The portrayal of the Nagarwala case demonstrates how literature can serve as a counter-discursive space, as Michel Foucault described, revealing how state power operates covertly and how historical truths are constructed. Sahgal (1983) notes in *Indira Gandhi: Her Road to Power* (1983) that the case was prosecuted unusually quickly, with three different judges hearing it over only three days. It resulted in a prison sentence that lacked several procedural safeguards, including failing to cross-examine Ved Prakash Malhotra, the cashier at the State Bank of India, despite his testimony containing significant discrepancies (p. 82). Such procedural issues suggest that the judicial system is not genuinely seeking the truth but is instead influenced by political considerations. This aligns with Foucault's assertion that the law functions as an instrument of power rather than a pursuit of justice, producing knowledge that reinforces state narratives while suppressing dissenting or destabilizing perspectives (Owen, 2017).

The novel closely parallels actual events; however, it also transforms them into fictional narratives that scrutinize official accounts. Major Bilimoria, a fictionalized version of Nagarwala, serves as the protagonist through whom Mistry explores how the government revises, conceals, and selectively memorializes history. Even incidents such as the car accident that resulted in the death of the head of the Special Inquiry Team, as depicted in the novel, bear a strong resemblance to the real-life death of D. K. Kashyap. His death was suspicious but remained unsolved. Foucault's concept of bio-power, which involves the state's regulation of bodies and their portrayal in discourse, is relevant here: both Nagarwala and Bilimoria are individuals whose bodies, testimonies, and deaths are subjected to state control and are symbolically erased. However, the novel's modifications to these elements are not merely imitative; they constitute a form of subversive historiography aligned with Stephen Greenblatt's cultural poetics. Mistry demonstrates that the narrative can resurrect silenced voices and reframe lost or distorted histories by assigning the name "S. Kashyap" to the official in the Delhi prison hospital and by including Bilimoria's final conversation with Gustad. This conversation is fictional, yet based on the actual event when Nagarwala attempted to contact journalist D. F. Karaka. In the real case, Nagarwala died without explanation. In the novel, Bilimoria has a deathbed confession, which allows for reflection and criticism. This story choice shows Greenblatt's point that literature operates within and against dominant ideologies.

Such a Long Journey constitutes a significant cultural artifact that constructs a counter-discourse to the primary historical narrative of the Nagarwala case by positioning Major Bilimoria as a site where memory and power are contested. Malak (1993) asserts that Mistry intentionally induces Bilimoria's disclosures into a state of delirium and impending mortality, thereby rendering his allegations indirect and difficult to comprehend (p.111). Although the narratives depicted distance might suggest that the claims are less specific, they reveal that truth is not absolute but a contested discourse often hidden by those in power. Bilimoria's semi-conscious confessions do not claim "truth" in a legal sense; instead, they highlight the fragility of official narratives and prompt readers to consider how history is constructed, remembered, and validated. Foucault's idea of power/knowledge is key here. The novel shows a system where information is manipulated to sustain the state's authority. Mrs. Gandhi's paranoia about foreign agencies like the CIA reflects efforts to create external threats, justifying authoritarian rule. Using newspaper clippings, rumors, and memories of Gustad and Bilimoria, it explores surveillance and repression, showing the state's use of violence and subtle tactics like fear, silence, and plausible deniability. The false news about Bilimoria's death mirrors suspicious deaths of leaders like Feroze Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri, affirming the state's power and silence.

The novel demonstrates how power operates in complex ways through systems such as surveillance, bureaucracy, and political manipulation. It challenges the state's official narratives by portraying individuals as victims of systemic

corruption rather than as solitary offenders, thereby revealing the fabricated nature of historical "truth." The novel aligns with both New Historicist and Foucauldian perspectives. It illustrates how literature can contest mainstream ideas and recover experiences that have been overlooked. Ultimately, it transforms history into a space for moral reflection, illustrating how fiction can oppose power by exposing lies and gaps in official discourse.

6.3. Subversion and Everyday Resistance

Stephen Greenblatt's notion of literature as a form of cultural negotiation and subversive re-inscription is equally relevant. Mistry's fictional recounting of the Nagarwala case develops what can be called a "cultural counter-memory." It creates a narrative space where unofficial historical stories, influenced by rumor and trauma, can spread and challenge dominant perspectives (Foucault, 1980). Major Bilimoria exemplifies more than mere character; he symbolizes the state's capacity for discipline. His disfigured physique and subdued voice exemplify Foucault's assertion that the body becomes an object of biopolitical regulation (Foucault, 1980). Gustad and others' constant worry about punishment, censorship, or violence shows how power is internalized, regulating behavior and thought without overt coercion. The novel reveals that state power is maintained not only from above but also through daily social structures such as the media, memory, and fiction. It acts as both testimony and critique. It employs Foucault's concept of history as a battleground for conflicting discourses and Greenblatt's notion that texts are not merely passive reflections of culture but active agents in shaping and resisting cultural forces.

Such a Long Journey depicts how marginalized individuals resist dominant power through small acts of dissent in their daily routines, not large revolts. Using epigraphs from Firdausi's *Shah Nama*, Eliot's *Journey of the Magi*, and Tagore's *Gitanjali*, the novel is set in a diasporic, historical context, highlighting displacement and the cultural memory of survival. These works show a spiritual journey of resistance, illustrating how the Parsi community faced exile and assimilation while preserving their identity. In this context, Gustad Noble is identified as a micro-political resistance figure whose moral dilemmas and constrained options exemplify what Michel de Certeau refers to as the "tactics of the weak," as subtle, non-confrontational strategies employed to challenge institutional authority (20, p. 37). Gustad's refusal to join Major Bilimoria's secret mission is not heroism but a moral stand against systemic corruption, even if the line between complicity and opposition blurs. His defiance deepens amid opposition from his family, especially Dilnavaz and Sohrab, highlighting how power complicates family ties and resistance. Sohrab's departure and rejection of state-approved education symbolize generational dissent, serving as a silent form of resistance against inherited values and nationalist norms. Gustad's act of covering windows with dark paper, initially linked to civil defense during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, symbolizes daily resistance. His refusal to remove the paper later signifies a ritual rejection of the state's mediated reality and a barrier against propaganda, violence, and fear. Morey (2004) emphasizes that this symbolic enclosure functions as both a safeguard and a psychological shield, allowing Gustad to maintain his independence amid a world increasingly influenced by nationalist hysteria and pervasive government narratives (p. 76). According to Foucault (1995), it represents a boundary of state surveillance, a person's effort to secure a space where they remain unseen in an environment where mechanisms of control continuously expand (p. 200).

The novel's exploration of determinism and moral agency within a chaotic postcolonial world also highlights (Greenblatt, 2012) the concept of subversion inherent in the structures it challenges (p. 21). Gustad strives to live morally upright despite his illness, facing bureaucracy, distrust, and grief. He sees resistance not as overthrow but as dignity amidst adversity. His brief journey to Delhi shifts from political conflict to a personal moral witness amid betrayal, loss, and declining trust in both state and community. Gustad's inability to influence Sohrab's decisions or address Roshan's illness shows the challenge of making choices under systemic pressures. It also highlights individual resilience despite spatial constraints. Set in Bombay, a city of corruption and division, it shows the struggle between resilience and oppression and between individual convictions and dominant political narratives. Rooted deeply in the complexities of politics and history, they serve as examples of Michel de Certeau's concept of "tactics." According to

De Certeau (1984), tactics are subtle, improvisational acts that resist domination without resorting to confrontation (pp. 91–110).

The depiction of fate as an all-encompassing, controlling force in the novel is comparable to Michel Foucault's concept of diffuse power. Michel Foucault's concept of diffuse power describes power as spread throughout society, operating at all levels. It is a relationship, a strategy, or a network of influence that shapes individuals and norms (Hussain & Saloi, 2024). Resistance here is not about destroying the system but constructing its significance. Dinshawji, Dr. Paymaster, and Peerbhoy Paanwala symbolize the struggle, using satire, humor, and discourse to challenge state authority and moral decline. Their cynical remarks undermine authority from within. The subversive use of language and irony resembles Greenblatt's concept. Greenblatt (2012) contended that both texts and individuals can challenge dominant ideologies by modifying their expressions and beliefs (pp. 21-65). Gustad Noble's confrontation manifests through ironic detachment and skepticism about government effectiveness. His witty critique of collapsing institutions shows his cautious, probing attitude. His refusal to give up on justice, despite setbacks, reflects a deliberate flexibility rather than revolutionary action. He avoids dismantling but also does not surrender to the system. Instead, he employs what Foucault would describe as a "micro-politics of resistance" to negotiate daily for meaning, dignity, and selfhood in a world that aims to erase these elements (Ilott, 2023).

The novel shows that resistance is a quiet but strong force that is part of everyday life. Mistry shows how small acts of care, dissent, and integrity can challenge the dominant power structures without directly confronting them through Gustad and the people around him. The narrative shifts the meaning of "resistance" to a deeply personal, long-lasting process that thrives on simple actions and moral choices. By focusing on resilience rather than rebellion, the novel establishes that people can maintain their freedom and dignity in unfair systems by simply and consistently asserting their humanity.

7. CONCLUSION

The study examines how personal memory, collective history, and political discourse converge in *Such a Long Journey*. It transforms the Parsi experience into a domain where narratives are critically examined, and new histories are unveiled. Rejecting official histories, the New Historicist perspective reveals how shifts in government, economy, and institutions fracture community identities and disrupt economic and social hierarchies. The study emphasizes the significance of trivialized voices by mirroring human lives in the tumultuous context of postcolonial India. It exemplifies the link between literature and history through themes of power, resistance, and discourse. The study thus argues that the narrative serves to recover concealed stories and reveal the ideological motivations underlying official histories. In conclusion, *Such a Long Journey* functions as both a literary and cultural intervention. It challenges the way power constructs and enforces its version of history. The work illustrates how censorship, surveillance, and narrative control are utilized for political objectives, drawing upon Foucault's perspective that history is a contested arena of discourses. It also reveals Greenblatt's concept of how literature influences and challenges culture. This study provides new insights into how literature plays a crucial role in turning the personal into the political, the private into the historical, and in safeguarding silent acts of rebellion by those marginalized from official histories.

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