CHAPTER THREE

MIDDLE CLASS UNCERTAINTIES

The constitution of the middle class in India...was based not on the economic power it wielded which was minimal but from the abilities of its members to be cultural entrepreneurs. (Joshi 2)

Politics and economics no longer make their presence felt surreptitiously and in the interstitial levels…but up front and with the full complement of bells, whistles and other noisy instruments. (Gupta x)

The aim of this chapter is to show that the middle class in India as presented in Postcolonial Indian Fiction is not a fixed category but a fluid entity that is constantly evolving as it accommodates and adjusts to the demands of a dynamic society. As Joshi elaborates

> The middle class in colonial north India were constituted not by their social and economic standing but through public sphere politics. Understanding the middle class as a project which was constantly in the making rather than a flat sociological fact helps us better understand the middle class and the tensions and contradictions that have necessarily been part of the making of middle class politics in lndia. (*Fractured Modernity* 2)

It is seen that the middle class is not just identified by its material possessions but by its ability to participate in public debates and issues common to society.As some of the novels show characters belonging to the middle class find themselves in economic hardship while others do not have financial worries. The term uncertainties, refers not to the anxieties of this class but to the shifting markers of this class. As pointed out by Joshi the middle class may be seen as an evolving category rather than a fixed entity. This is shown in novels like Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) and *Family Matters* (2001).

The *middle class,* composed of people who are neither poor nor rich, has grown to be a formidable part of the population having significant impact on the socio-economical, and even political, scenario of post-independence India. There appear to be intermediary classes within the broad category representing the middle class. There are on one hand, people who are not only solvent but have comfortable incomes and spending patterns. On the other, there are people managing their lives on a strict budget, without the ability

to spend freely. Yet because of their being educated and conscious of public developments they are included in the middle class. It follows that it is not the income generated or the material assets, so much as the conscious mindset of this vast majority in India which determines it as the middle class. Moreover, the middle classes are centred in the cities and connected with the vibrancy of city life. They represent both the market base as well as the cultural universe in urban India.

This chapter draws upon Joshi's classification of the middle class in colonial India as the attributes he identifies in that context are applicable to some of the novels. According to Joshi, they were the 'service communities,' exposed to Western education and cultural values (*Fractured Modernity* 7). They were financially comfortable but needed to earn their living. Joshi explains:

> Sharing certain similarities in social and economic background, such as education, occupation, or profession, a certain group of people became producers and products of a new cultural politics, which allowed them to articulate and share a new set of beliefs, values and modes of politics clearly distinguished the middle class from other social groups...But more important...was their transformation of traditional cultural values and the basis of social hierarchy. (7-8)

What Joshi affirms is the emerging consciousness amongst a group of educated people who were willing to apprehend and welcome the values of modernity in their midst. This middle class chose "a social, cultural and political agenda" which was different from that of the "feudal or decadent indigenous elite" as well as from the lower classes (8).

The people belonging to the middle class have their own typical hopes and aspirations, problems and desperations, anxieties and agonies, which attract the attention and interest of renowned postcolonial Indian authors writing in English. Rohinton Mistry's novels revolve around different aspects of Parsi middle class life and society. Two of his novels—*Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters*—have been taken for study in this chapter. They both mirror hopes and aspirations, problems and desperations, anxieties and agonies of middle class Parsi families during two critical periods in independent

India. Although the two novels revolve around Parsi families, they delineate average Indian families, since the Parsi community has been amalgamated with the Indian society almost indistinguishably.

Despite migrating to Canada when he was twenty three, Mistry chooses to write about the Parsi community in India. He is firmly rooted in the urban middle class milieu, and that makes him competent to portray realistic middle class characters. In an interview, with Nermeen Shaikh of *Asia Source,* he discusses why he writes about Bombay and its middle class Parsis, the world he has left behind:

> Going to Canada, faced with the reality of earning a living and realizing that although I had, up to that point of my life, read books and listened to music that came from the west, there was a lot more involved in *living* in the West. I felt very comfortable with the books and the music, but actually, *living* in the West made that same music seem much less relevant. It suddenly brought home to me very clearly the fact that I was imitating something that was not mine, that made no sense in terms of my own life, my own reality.(quoted in Roy and Pillai:13-14)

Mistry realizes that one cannot give up one's past even after shifting to a new country with a different culture. While Western values and ideas seem familiar on paper, he finds that living is a totally different act. Having dissociated himself from familiar values and experiences within the Parsi community in India, he finds that his sensibility has been shaped by them. Hence, his decision to return to his roots in his writing.

The main *objective* of this chapter is to observe closely how Mistry sees the middle class of his community, which is a part of the larger Indian middle class, in his two novels. It shall examine critically how some of the ideologies of the middle class people are reflected in Mistry's fiction through their culture and lifestyle.

The first novel, *Such a Long Journey,* depicts a family reality–it dramatizes convincingly how an honest and naive man with a host of middle class problems can get entangled in events beyond his grasp and understanding. In the second novel, *Family Matters*, Rohinton Mistry depicts a domestic crisis of a middle class Parsi family and how it

struggles to cope with it, and in the process he highlights the heritage and the legacy of his own community.

Such a Long Journey:

Such a Long Journey is set in the city of Bombay (Mumbai), Maharashtra, in the year 1971, at the time of Pakistan's war with Bangladesh, and its story revolves around the members of a middle class Parsi family. The novel's protagonist Gustad Noble is a hard working bank clerk and a devoted family man who is too preoccupied with his financial hardships and personal problems to ponder deeply at the country's recent political developments. The Noble family includes Gustad and his wife Dilnavaz, and their three children, the brilliant nineteen year old elder son Sohrab, fifteen year old Darius and nine year old daughter Roshan. The main actions of the novel take place within the limits of the middle class Parsi community of the Khodadad building where the Gustad family lives. However, the novel can hardly be said to deal exclusively with the Parsi community as the action swells to encompass the wider world within which the main characters function. As the novel advances, Gustad's life is changed suddenly due to personal conflict with his son Sohrab, political intrigue and government corruption. This gist of the novel gives an idea of the middle class problems and anxieties, which it addresses.

Once a part of the elite trading class, Gustad and a large part of his community have now become solidly middle class, with their fortunes declining - now they can only remember fondly through songs and childhood memories of a once affluent life in the past. In the novel, Gustad nostalgically remembers the good old days, his grandfather's furniture shop with the sign, "Noble & Sons, Makers of Fine Furniture" and the proudly displayed gleaming and dignified cherry-coloured furniture within it, like the furniture that graced his childhood home. There was presence of prosperity everywhere in his grandfather's home where every occasion was celebrated with great pomp and splendour. One particular night Gustad has a glimpse of such a celebration in his dream:

> He had dreamt of his childhood… it was a day of great gaiety and celebration, of laughter ringing through the house, flowers filling up the

> rooms- in vases, in strands of *tohran* over doorways - and music, music all day long…playing non-stop on the gramophone, playing in his dream while his grandmother sent the servants out repeatedly to buy special herbs and *masala* for the feast cooking under her supervision. There was such excitement and happiness filling his beloved childhood home, the sadness in his heart was acute when he awoke. (*Such A Long Journey* 19)

Gustad's dream is indicative of the weakness or craze of the middle class people for household celebrations to project their social image satisfactorily. It is a case of might have been, as recalls his family history through a nostalgic haze. Given the limitations of the present, Gustad allows his imagination to escape to a more affluent past in his dreams.

Further, as Dickey observes in her Madurai study, the middle class people are very much conscious of the image of their standing in the public. To project their image satisfactorily in the society is however a source of anxiety to the middle class people in the face of undeclared competition amongst themselves. After the dream Gustad's middle class self-conceit inspires him to celebrate his daughter Roshan's birthday and Sohrab's success in clearing the IIT entrance examination, in his own modest way by throwing a small party. Gustad decides to buy chicken from the Crawford Market to celebrate the event. As Gustad makes his way "with his meager wallet and worn basket lined with newspaper to soak up meat juices that could start dripping in the bus," he is reminded of the fact that "he could count on the fingertips of one hand," the "number of times he had been able to afford chicken for his family in the last twenty years" ("The Pleasures and Anxieties of Being in the Middle" 21-22). Even as Gustad's decision to throw a party 'with chicken as the centre of attraction' in spite of his financial constraints, is typical of the middle class ego, it also draws attention to the hardship which is a part of their everyday reality.

The seventies, after the Bangladesh war, as the novel presents, is a period of acute scarcity in the whole of India, and the ordinary middle class people are the worst hit. Even basic food items, like chicken and good quality rice, are beyond the reach of the masses. Therefore, for the party, Dilnavas has to purchase good quality long grain rice (even though a very small amount) from the black market at high price:

> And there was rice, studded with cloves and cinnamon sticks: fragrant basmati rice that Dilnavas had obtained from the black-market fellow for this special day, trading one week's quota of fat, tasteless ration-shop rice for four cups of the slender, delicious grain. (45)

Dilnavas, like every middle class housewife, has to compromise with her household budget for this purpose. For a single income family like that of the Nobles, throwing even a small party means careful planning and adjustments with the monthly household budget. Such situations greatly pain Gustad, who has *seen* prosperity in his childhood, with his grandfather as an owner of a furniture shop, and his father of a book shop.

When Gustad reminisces about his secure and comfortable childhood days and his father's financial prosperity and then his uncle's betrayal of his father and his subsequent bankruptcy, Gustad's mind is filled with deep sorrow and anger. He clearly remembers how Fate has reversed their lives:

> His father's bookstore had been treacherously despoiled and ruined. The shock, the shame of it had made his mother ill. How swiftly moved the finger of poverty, soiling and contaminating. Soon afterwards, his mother had died. (8)

Gustad's past memories are filled with pain. The changed circumstances are all the more painful because they are connected with his mother's death. He feels that the shock of bankruptcy must have killed his mother. The two things remain forever linked in his mind.

However, it is a trait of the middle class to plan and strive to overcome difficult situations and regain social status. Gustad fights back and survives, and working as a bank clerk, somehow manages to support his family with a meager income. Like all middle class fathers, Gustad takes good care to provide modern education to all his three children, although he fails to provide them some of the comforts he had as a child. His children have to share a single cramped room and his eldest son Sohrab does not even have a proper bed to sleep on. His small rented flat is filled with old furniture from his grandfather's days. Gustad spends judiciously every hard-earned rupee to buy the basic necessities, and takes utmost care to avoid extravagance and wastage. Limited income

and soaring price rise force the Noble family to apply for a 'milk ration card', but issue of such a *card* is indefinitely delayed due to official red-tapism and government corruption. Dilnavas, vividly "remembered the days when ration cards were only for the poor or the servants, the days when she and Gustad could afford to buy the fine creamy product of Parsi Dairy Farm…before the prices started to go up, up, up, and never came down." (3) The threat of an Indo-Pak war, fund raising campaigns for the Indian soldiers along with government corruption escalate the price of every necessary item of day-to-day life: "Then the price of Odomos (mosquito repellent cream) went up, along with the price of every necessity and luxury, from matchsticks to sanitary napkins"(83). Much as they hated applying for the milk ration card it is a wry acceptance of their straightened circumstances. Middle class or not, they were experiencing acute financial constraint and there was no way they could pretend that they could make ends meet.

The increasing mosquito population within the flat and in the locality makes Gustad exclaim in disgust: "People keep pissing on the wall as if it was their father's lavatory…" (79). He had noticed the stench along the black wall as he came home from work: "Ignorant people will never understand the wall is not a public latrine, he thought. He flung his hands above his head to ward off the flies and mosquitoes"(77). Interestingly, this wall which had become a huge problem—it ran the length of the compound and was over six feet high—had at one time provided privacy to the residents of the building. It was part of an unfinished structure which lay incomplete after the collapse of one wing of the newly constructed building killed seven workers. Since the place was getting more and more polluted and people including his daughter frequently fell ill, Gustad decides to do something about the dirty wall. He notices a pavement artist one day near the Flora Fountain and decides to interest him in giving the wall a facelift.

The artist inspects the wall and agrees to take on the project once the wall is cleaned. Gustad asks him: "Will you be able to draw enough to cover three hundred feet? I mean, do you know enough different gods to fill the whole wall?" (182) The artist replies:

> 'There is no difficulty. I can cover three hundred miles if necessary. Using assorted religions and their gods, saints and prophets: Hindu, Sikh, Judaic, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jainist. Actually, Hinduism alone can

> provide enough. But I always like to mix them up, include a variety in my drawings. Makes me feel I am doing something to promote tolerance and understanding in the world.' (182)

Once the wall is clean and dry the artist gets to work. As Gustad leaves for work he asks the man what he is drawing, he tells him:

> 'Trimurti. Of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the gods of creation, preservation anddestruction. If that is all right with you, sir? Or I can do something else.' 'Oh no, it's fine,' said Gustad. He would have preferred a portrait of Zarathustra to inaugurate the wall, but realized that this triad would have a far-reaching influence in dissuading the urinators and defecators. When he returned in the evening, the artist had lit the Petromax. The Trimurti was complete, as well as a grim, sanguinary Crucifixion. A representation of the Jumma Masjid was in progress—since Islam prohibited portraits, he restricted himself to drawings of the famous mosques. (183)

The artist informs him that he would work all night which would keep the offenders at bay. The narrator informs:

> Over the next few days, the wall filled up with gods, prophets and saints. When Gustad checked the air each morning and evening, he found it free of malodour. Mosquitoes and flies were no longer quite the nuisance they used to be; with their breeding grounds drying up, the numbers diminished dramatically….The holy countenances on the wall—some grim and vengeful, some jovial, some compassionate,others frightful and awe-inspiring, yet others kind and avuncular—watched over the road, the traffic, the passers-by, day and night….Together they awaited the uncertain future. (183-84)

This is how Gustav's thinking mind combines with the artist's hard work to tackle a problem and solve it before it takes a toll on their lives. This wall may be seen as a symbol of India's rich culture which embraces eclecticism as well as contradictions in life and in spirit. However desperate and naughty the plan might have been, it would stand out as a sign of the richness of Indian culture with its multiple faiths on the same page or canvas.

While the painted wall takes care of the mosquito problem, others continue as the middle class is made conscious of the extra taxes and surcharges they have to pay during war time. They learn of the compulsory 'Refugee Relief Tax', which is 'killing the middle-class' (230). Working at the bank, Gustad can see that "more and more people had to draw on their savings" (230). Due to government policy, gross mismanagement and corruption, there is a steady decline in the standard of living of the ordinary middle class that result in growing resentment, ironically not against the government but against God. Such is the helplessness of the common man. Cavasji, an eighty year old resident of Khodadad building develops the habit of leaning his head out of the window to "reprimand the sky" and to express his displeasure loudly for "Almighty's grossly inequitable way of running the universe" (87): "To the Tatas You give so much! And nothing for me? To the Wadias You give, You keep on giving! You cannot hear my prayers? To pocket of the Camas only You will fill! We others don't need it, You think?" (87) Cavasji's indignation represents that of an average middle class old man.

Obviously, one needs more than the basic necessities or the bare minimum to live with some comfort and dignity—there is the need of respectable savings to meet any kind of emergency, which is, then, not possible for an average middle class family. Gustad and Dilnavas have to resort to drastic measures to make ends meet. Roshan's chronic illness forces Gustad to sell his camera and Dilnavas, her gold bangle to pay the medical bills. To avoid paying the doctor's fee, the Nobles visit their family physician Dr. Paymaster, as infrequently as possible. Dilnavas uses to stack the most frequently used medicines at home and prescribes them not only to her own children but to those of the neighbours as well. Mistry gives a graphic description of some of the common anxieties of the middle class people at that time.

The Noble family reflects what Sara Dickey observes in her Madurai study - the middle class people often censor and curtail their aspirations and necessities, they are not wasteful or extravagant, and they resort to careful planning and deliberate spending to acquire necessary commodities, and apply restraint making choices. Although they are not as unable as the poor to acquire the desirable goods regardless of their aspirations or strategic planning, but, at the same time, not able, to enjoy the gratification like the rich,

the middle class people are more likely to make ‘simple’ choices than to display the thoughtless excess of the wealthy (Dickey 576).

Post-independence India sees the gap between the rich and the middle class gradually widening, the rich getting richer and the middle class people witnessing a steady decline in their prosperity, at least till the early 1990s. The two wars, Indo-China war in 1962 and Bangladesh war during 1971-72 make essential commodities scarce or unavailable. Control and restriction imposed on supply of water and electricity make it difficult for the common man to pull on. In such a situation, the educated middle class of the sixties and the seventies are too preoccupied with their family budgets and household problems to have time and energy to question or attempt to subvert the hegemony of the rich and the powerful. The novel subtly depicts how the rich and the powerful are silently overshadowing the very existence of the urban middle class.

Like an average middle class father, Gustad Noble has high expectation from his son Sohrab of a bright future. Sohrab has been all throughout a very bright student. Even at the tender age of ten, Sohrab could speak fluent English and quite comfortably could clear the entrance examination and interview at the St. Xavier’s High School, which was known for its tough selection procedure of new students. Struggling himself to meet the bare necessities of middle class standard, Gustad wishes to fulfill his own unfulfilled dreams through Sohrab by shaping his future, and for this purpose Gustad wants his son to get a degree at the Indian Institute of Technology(IIT) so that he gets a good job in future. A cause of anxiety for the middle class people is their deep concern for their children comprising the next generation. They leave nothing undone within their capacity to build a solid and safe base so that their children can stand on it and shape their careers for a smoother, happier and more prosperous life than theirs. This unusual concern for the next generation is a typical middle class trait, which is rare in the other two classes at the two extremes. Success in building a solid base for their children is a source of immense pleasure and satisfaction for the middle class.

So, his son’s refusal to join the IIT even after cracking the tough entrance test comes as a bolt from the blue to Gustad, and he feels broken and betrayed:

> O Dada Ormuzd, what kind of joke is this ? In me, when I was young, You put the desire to study, get ahead, be a success. Then You took away my father's money, left me rotting in the bank. And for my son? You let me arrange everything, put it within reach, but You take away his appetite for IIT. (55)

With bitterness, he recalls the days of hardship and sacrifice that he and Dilnavaz willingly faced in order to make their son's future:

> Every year at exam-time we fed him seven almonds at daybreak… With holes in my shoes I went to work, so we could buy almonds to sharpen his brain. At two hundred rupees a kilo. And all wasted. All gone in the gutter-water. (122)

With bitterness he says to his wife:

> 'Look at that,… All the places I went for the ungrateful boy'. He held up the forms one by one. 'Parsi Punchayet Education Fund. R.D Sethna Trust. Tata Scholarships. Wadia Charities for Higher Studies. All of them I went to, touched my forehead, joined my hands, and said sir and madam and please and thank you a hundred times to make them promise scholarships'. (81)

The father-son conflict seems to be ruled by money which to the older person promises security. Like all middle class parents, Gustad wants his son to be focused and successful in life. More than that, he wants to be assured of at least a financially secure future for his son. The son, however, fails to appreciate his father's concern and wants to be allowed to decide what he wants in life.

Gustad's mental wound is so deep that even after several months he asks himself in utter disappointment:

> What was left… after the very purpose he had struggled and worked and waited for all these years – after the very purpose was callously shattered by his own son, and the shards kicked aside, dropped clattering in the rubbish- pail, like his application forms. All I wanted was for him to have a chance at a good career. The chance wrenched away from me. Now what is left? What is left in life? Tell me, Dada Ormuzd, what? (178)

Gustad's sorrow and disappointment are deepened by his son Sohrab's ignorance of his father's concern for his future, He does not appreciate the fact that his father's efforts

were directed at freeing him from the financial worries of the middle. But Sohrab, still unaccustomed with the class complexities in the society, has his own view and ideology regarding a successful life. He is 'sick and tired' (48) of hearing the word IIT all the time; he is not at all interested in it. With utter disgust, he blurts to his father at the dinner party thrown apparently at his success:

> Why can't you just accept it? IIT does not interest me. It was never my idea, you made the plans. I told you I am going to change to the arts programme, I like my college, and all my friends here. (48)

With blood boiling in his head, Gustad later strongly warns him:

> For the last time, take my advice,… Forget your friends; forget your college and its useless degree. Think of your future. Every bloody peon or two-paisa clerk is a B.A. these days. (69).

Gustad has seen the world; he has himself struggled to survive and pull on his life. An exceedingly sharp and sensitive boy, it is not until Sohrab steps into his college days that it strikes him:

> Daddy never made pronouncements or dreamed dreams of an artist-son. It was never: my son will paint, my son will act, he will write poetry. No, it was always: my son will be a doctor, he will be an engineer, he will be research scientist…(then) the dream of IIT took shape, then took hold of their imaginations. And the Indian Institute Of Technology became the promised land. It was El- Dorado and Shangri-La, It was Atlantis and Camelot, It was Xanadu and Oz. It was the home of the Holy Grail. And all things would be possible and all things would come to the pass for he who journeyed there and emerged with the sacred chalice. (66-67)

Sohrab finds that his father is rather obsessed about his future without caring for his own interest and opinion. He is in opposition to his father's belief that only a good engineering degree can bring both money and respect in a growing materialistic and corrupt society. Sohrab's generation is attracted more towards the new world around, mostly shaped by western values which bear testimony to colonial heritage.

On the other hand Gustad has seen the plight of an average middle class artist. His friend, Malcolm Saldanha, a musician, "who used to summon the (musical) notes like magic" (331) fails to make a living pursuing his passion and is forced to take up a job in the city Municipal Corporation. Sohrab's attitude, right or wrong, gives a severe jolt to the otherwise smooth-going Gustad family. But, this is not the end to his problems; he has many other problems in store to destabilize his family life. Mistry effectively narrates how the middle class people are vulnerable to being trapped in the intricacies of the existing political system and corruption. The story of Gustad that follows is one of such vulnerability adding to his anxieties and miseries.

As the novel unfolds, Mistry gets the private life of Gustad Noble inextricably entangled with that of the public. The common man is directly or indirectly trapped in the rampant corruption and political turmoil of the period. Gustad is dragged into Major Bilimoria's scheme for siphoning money into an illegal account, ostensibly to aid the revolutionary Bangladesh Mukti Bahini (liberation army) in its war for liberation of erstwhile East Pakistan from West Pakistan. This part of the novel is based on an actual historical event involving a Parsi agent Mr. Nagarwala from RAW, a branch of the Indian Intelligence Service. Major Bilimoria is the fictional character portraying Mr. Nagarwala:

> The actual event that Mistry focused on is known in India as the Nagarwala case. In the winter of 1971, it was reported in the papers that the Head Cashier of the State Bank of India in Delhi had given six million rupees to Mr. Nagarwala on the basis of a phone call from Mrs. Gandhi (then Prime Minister) who, he claimed, had asked him to take this great risk in the name of Mother India. After he had delivered the cash to Mr. Nagarwala in a pre assigned place, the Head Clerk had doubts about his act and went to the police. Mrs. Gandhi denied that she had made any such telephone call and the Head Clerk was suspended. Nagarwala was arrested a few days later and confessed that he had mimicked Mrs. Gandhi's voice (Mukherjee 145 -146). (quoted in Roy and Pillai 121)

It was suspected that Nagarwala, the RAW agent, was entrapped by the Prime Minister, exploiting his patriotic feelings. In the novel, Mistry makes a similar suggestion through Ghulam Mohammed, Bilimoria's friend, colleague and mouthpiece. Ghulam says to Gustad: "Things are not what they seem. He (Bilimoria) is trapped by the ones at the

top" (215). The fictional counterpart of Nagarwala, Major Bilimoria, in the Delhi prison hospital, says to his friend Gustad where the money collected by him could have gone: "Money I was disbursing for supplies… intercepted. By Prime Minister's office. To a private account….One possibility- to finance her son's car factory. Or could be for election fund,…".(278)

Detecting the whole fraud, Bilimoria takes an amount of ten lakh rupees out of the total sixty lakhs and sends the money to Gustad to deposit it in an account of his Bank so that it can be later used for the welfare of the people living in Khodadad Building who really need it. He thinks it would be a suitable reward to "those ministers and politicians,…getting fatter and fatter, sucking our blood…" (279). Moreover , he is confident that if the major chunk of money reaches the Prime Minister's office, no one will bother about the missing ten lakh rupees since "every pipeline has leaks" (279). But Bilimoria is grossly mistaken. The police come and arrest him and make a case on charge of impersonating the voice of the Prime Minister. "She gave me a blank sheet of paper and her own fountain- pen. I wrote my confession like an idiot" (277), he says to Gustad. In the final confession scene, the enfeebled Bilimoria's halting revelation of his manipulation by the Prime Minister and his progressive physical and mental decline after police torture leaves Gustad in no doubt that they have all taken corruption for granted as a part of Indian life and it exists at a level that confounds belief. Bilimoria says: "Gustad, it is beyond common man's imagination, the things being done by those in power" (280). His own plan is to endure his four-year prison sentence and "then forget about it" (280).

Mistry portrays Gustad as a witness and victim of political intricacies and corruption, even at the highest level. An honest and naive family man cherishing deep moral values like all middle class people, Gustad is thrown into a dirty world hitherto unknown to him. By the time Gustad returns to Bombay after what turns out to be his last meeting with his friend Bilimoria, India is openly at war with Pakistan over the issue of liberation movement in Bangladesh. News of the war is printed in bold letters on the front page of the newspapers. Gustad is easily beguiled by the "moving stories of how Bangladeshis had cheered the arrival of the first Indian troops in Dacca" (310). As he pores over the newspapers over the next few days, "like everyone else, Gustad had begun to feel the glow of national pride" but suddenly one day, a small news item in "an obscure corner"

of the paper jolts him back to his senses: "When he read it, the glow of national pride dropped from him like a wet raincoat". The news in a small paragraph "stated that Mr. J. Bilimoria, a former officer with RAW, had died of a heart attack while serving his four-year prison sentence in New Delhi" (311). Gustad is skeptical about the details given in the news. By this last episode of Gustad, Mistry wants to assert that even the press is not free to tell the truth; the media is simply a tool used by those in power to promote an ideology that suits their purpose.

Antonio Gramsci, while talking about the procedures employed by the dominant group over the subordinated group to perpetuate a system of subordination, states that, to create an "ideological unity" and to secure the consent of the governed, media plays a very crucial role.

> Press is the most dynamic part of the ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything that directly or indirectly influences or could influence public opinion belongs to it…. (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 53)

Public institutions, such as schools, colleges, universities et cetera are used by the ruling class to make their desired ideology a common world view for the people, to put certain ideas into the mind of the common public as the only existing truth to justify their political decisions. As such, Roshan and Darius start demanding newspapers as part of the war fund-raising movement at school. Teachers compel them to bring newspapers to school to be sold to raise funds for the soldiers fighting for the country: "Teachers arranged fund-raising contests, and the newspapers were weighed every morning. The results were announced during assembly." (83)

Similar incidents occur during the 1962 Indo-China war also , when "teams of fund-raising politicians", tour around the neighbourhood of Khodadad Building, and depending on their party affiliation, they either praise the "Congress government's heroic stance" or criticize its "incompetency" for sending the Indian soldiers with outdated weapons and inadequate clothing "to die at the Himalayas at Chinese hands". The

politicians' appeal to support wholeheartedly the brave soldiers as well as Mother India receives very positive response from the people:

> And the people were moved to staunch the flow of yellow invaders. They threw blankets and sweaters and scarves out of their windows into the open Lorries that passed below. In some wealthy localities, the collection drive turned into a competition, with neighbours trying to outdo one another in their attempts to simultaneously seem rich, patriotic and compassionate. (10)

It is usually the middle class people who can be easily emotionally involved in such circumstances. But when the initial enthusiasm dies down different picture appears:

> Afterwards, it was said that some of the donated goods had turned up for sale in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar, and in the stalls of roadside hawkers everywhere, though not much attention was paid to that nasty allegation; the glow of national unity was still warm and comforting. (10)

It is just a betrayal of simplicity, sincerity and honesty of the common man. Though in times of war, the common man supports his country and his mind glows with national pride, he is unable to understand the reason as to why these wars are being fought and what benefit they would bring to the nation. Dinshawji says to Gustad: "Have you seen all the pictures in the newspapers? Bloody butchers, slaughtering left and right. And look at the whole world, completely relaxed, doing nothing." (76)

The common people want to live peacefully with their families and friends with safety and security. But the devastation of the two wars within a span of a decade leaves a deep impact on the lives of the middle class. For the first time in post-independence India, the middle class seems to be so pessimistic about the future. It is reflected in Gustad Noble's reluctance to remove the blackout papers after the Bangladesh war is over:

> After the euphoria of flags, banners, and victory parades had passed; after the crowds' last cheers for the Jawans and the Prime Minister had faded; after the enemy's unconditional surrender had wiped out rankling memories of ignominious defeat at Chinese hands nine years ago,… after the billboards and

> hoardings were divested of wartime exhortations; after the blackout was lifted and cities returned to light… after all this, Gustad still did not remove the paper from his windows" (309-310).

For some reasons Gustad finds it unnecessary to remove the blackout papers; perhaps he cannot accept the country's victory and the crowds' cheers to be true and hence cannot make that final necessary gesture; perhaps Gustad has still doubt in his mind if the senseless war has ended permanently bringing good days to the people. Mistry brilliantly describes the common man's disapproval of any war, whether it is a win or a defeat, and his hatred for the disproportionate euphoria created in the masses by a war. It is no denying the fact that the middle class people get more involved than others in such euphoria. It is the middle class people who suffer most in the 1960s and the 1970s because of the post-war scarcities in many fields.

Family Matters:

Family Matters is also set in the Bombay of 1990s, and the story revolves around two middle class families – the families of Nariman Vakeel and Yezad Chenoy. Nariman Vakeel is a seventy-nine year old Parsi widower beset by Parkinson's disease who lives with his two middle-aged step-children, Jal and Coomy. However, an accidental fall and a broken ankle make his condition critical and he is forced to take up residence with his daughter Roxana, her husband Yezad Chenoy and their two young sons, Murad and Jehangir. This new responsibility proves too much for Yezad, who is already besieged by financial worries. The home which was once filled with laughter and happiness turns into a house of anger and frustration. The novel is as much about the problems of family life as about the struggle for survival of the middle class in a teeming city of corruption and religious intolerance.

As in *Such a Long Journey*, financial constraints and scarcity are a major issue in *Family Matters* as well. Money is the biggest concern for the middle class. Sara Dickey records in her Madurai study how succinctly a female doctor, who claims herself to be in the 'middle', distinguishes the lower, middle and upper classes: "The higher class has money and wants to know what to do with it, the middle class has to search for money to get

something, and the lower class cannot find the money even if it wants to get those things"(Dickey 575).

Acute hardship of Nariman Vakeel and his step-children is evident in the very beginning of the novel. Mistry draws a vivid picture how this middle class family is forced to live in uncongenial place for want of money. He also narrates a host of middle class domestic problems which seem to be insurmountable to the members of the family. The seven room flat they reside in, known as Chateau Felicity, is no doubt spacious according to Bombay standard, but its repulsive gloomy appearance due to lack of maintenance makes it unlivable. Out of its three toilets only one remains in working condition and the rooms which badly need a fresh coat of paint are filled with old furniture and "threadbare sofas and chairs" (*Family Matters* 19).

When the two families gather on the seventy ninth birthday of Nariman, the conversation gradually changes to dwell on family problems and anxieties: Coomy expresses to Roxana and Yezad the hardship of running a home with a tight budget. Yezad agrees and says "We all have the same problem" (23). Coomy then adds that Nariman's gradual deteriorating condition and his stubbornness at taking an evening walk everyday are causes of great concern to her. If "something terrible happened", she says, it would not be possible for them to afford an ayah or nurse, and they would have no other alternative but to "deliver him straightaway to the Chenoy residence". She then adds:

> Jal will tell you how hopeless the share bazaar is, Mamma's investments make barely enough to let us eat dal-chaaval. And you know better than anyone, Pappa used up all his money to pay for your flat. (35)

The conversation reveals that the two families are very much burdened by their domestic problems and necessities, and the root cause of their anxieties is money. But the greatest problem for a middle class family is to find a solution to the money problem, for the avenues for earning money are limited and fixed for them.

Yezad works at the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium as a sales manager. Since his marriage with Roxana, he has been living in a tiny two room flat in Pleasant Villa. The flat is a gift from his father-in-law Nariman Vakeel. Since his own ancestral home Jehangir Mansion has been sold, the flat given by Nariman is the best thing Yezad and

Roxana could have. At that time, the newly built Pleasant Villa was quite a pleasant place to live in. But this pleasantness seems to be gradually fading:

> In the years immediately after it was built, four-storeyed Pleasant Villa was indeed a pleasant place to live .But rent control and the landlord's determined neglect had reduced it to the state of most buildings in Bombay, with crumbling plaster, perforated water tanks, and broken drain pipes. Its exterior, once peach in colour, now resembled the outcome of an emetic. Electrical wiring had badly deteriorated, made a meal of by sewer rats. And the wrought–iron balcony railings, the building's finest feature, were also being eaten, by corrosion. (98)

As the years roll on, unpleasantness and unhappiness gradually creep into the domestic life of Yezad and Roxana. With accelerated price rise, it becomes increasingly difficult for Roxana to manage the household budget with Yezad's meager income. Soon, they begin to indulge in fighting over the issue of money and bitter arguments become every day events.

Because of financial difficulties they have to resort to stringent budgeting and maximum austerity in running the household. After putting allotted amount in envelopes with clearly marked labels such as *Butter and Bread*, *Gas Cylinder*, *Ghee, Rice and Sugar, Milk and Tea, Water and Electricity* and so on, there is hardly any money left to meet some other unavoidable expenses such as paying medical bills and doctor's fees during children's illness. One day Roxana tells Yezad with utmost bitterness:

> I am stuck with the problem of paying for doctor. Why don't you do the budgeting, you'll find out how little money there is, how difficult to buy both food and medicine. (96)

Theirs is a life devoid of any luxury, even devoid of basic necessities such as water; due to shortage of water, Roxana allows her sons to have a bath only on alternate days. As possessing a car is still a dream for a common man, Yezad takes the discomfort of travelling in public transport. Every day he jumps into the train for work by performing some "tactical maneuvers", a skill necessary to survive in the urban jungle; hanging from the bars outside the train or swinging from the railings inside like an "apeman" and then squeezing himself nearer one of the fans "to minimize his own sweating and the smell of

armpits around him". (137) Yezad detests scarcity, dirt and above all discomfort of travelling in public transport, the local trains. And to put an end to such a life, he wants to emigrate to Canada:

> His dream for an end to this ape-man commute had led him to apply for immigration to Canada. He wanted clean cities, clean air, plenty of water, trains with seats for everyone, where people stood in line at the bus stops and said please, after you, thank you. Not just the land of milk and honey, also the land of deodorant and toiletry. (137)

Mistry describes the image of the West, of western life an average middle class man in India has in his mind. One cannot deny that such an image fixed in the mind of a middle class Indian is an indirect impact of the cultural ideology of imperialism, which the British scrupulously impose during their rule. Even today many Indians have not been able to question the logical validity of their conscious or unconscious belief that anything British or anything Western is good. Yezad seems to be influenced by such inhibitions.

At the same time, some advantages brought by globalization also begin to encourage immigration by educated and skilled middle class Indians to rich countries like USA, Canada, UK, France, Australia and the oil-rich states of the Middle-East with the hope of getting clean environment, prosperity and job satisfaction, which they find lacking in their own country. It is not that these people always want to emigrate permanently nor is it true that they are always happy to settle in a foreign land. But at the same time it is also true that some people who come back after working in a foreign country cannot be happy in their mother land. Rangarajan, the hospital assistant who plastered Nariman's fractured leg, is trying to emigrate and asks Nariman if he has any friends or colleagues in foreign countries, who might help him to get a job there. Rangarajan worked in Kuwait for several years but had to come back to India because of the Gulf War, but now cannot adjust himself to the working conditions of Indian hospitals. Rangarajan expresses to Nariman that he is thinking of emigrating once again:

> I used to work in a Kuwaiti hospital. But after Gulf War everyone was kicked out. George Bush killed the Iraqis, and killed our jobs. Now my main objective is to go somewhere else for better prospects. And U.S. is best. (54)

But the middle class values make Nariman skeptical and force him to querry: “And what about his soul’s prospects…Would they improve in a foreign land?”(54)

However, the dream of prosperity, clean and hygienic cities and beautiful mountains and lakes continue to inspire many educated middle class youths to keep their efforts alive to migrate to the west. In such a zest and fervour, several years ago, Yezad too wrote a letter to the Canadian High Commission. As Yezad was aware that since “he was not an engineer, nurse, technician or anyone in high demand” (249), he wrote a “paean to Canada” (249) to draw their interest. And six months later the entire family was invited for an interview. Years later, Yezad told his son Jehangir that he was really surprised and quite unimpressed too, to see Mr. Mazobashi , the Immigration Officer:

> …when I saw the man, I didn’t think it was the Immigration Officer - the fellow was dressed like a chaprassi, in a crumpled kurta-type shirt hanging over his pants, feet in Kolhapuri chappals, filthy toenails… So this shabbily dressed man was going to conduct the interview… Perhaps Canadians were even more casual than Americans.(251-252)

Right from the beginning, immediately after the introduction, the Immigration Officer, Mr. Mazobashi was quite indifferent to the Chenoys. He was disinterested perhaps because none of the Chenoys was a technical person, or an MBA with computer knowledge. After opening the file, in a very casual manner, he started firing questions at them and then made some very rude remarks:

> ‘You Indians’ … ‘You’re so naive. You want to go and freeze your butts in a country you understand nothing about, just to make a pile of money. Well, thanks for your interest in Canada, we’ll let you know’. (253)

But again, the middle class ego made Yezad give a fitting reply before leaving:

> You, sir, are a rude and ignorant man, a disgrace to your office and country. You have sat here abusing us, abusing Indians and India, one of the many countries your government drains of its brainpower, the brainpower that is responsible for your growth and prosperity. Instead of having the grace to thank us, you spew your prejudices and your bigoted ideas…you sir, might be expected, more than anyone else, to understand and embody the more enlightened Canadian ideals of

> multiculturalism. But if you are anything to go by, then Canada is a gigantic hoax. (253)

Yezad's reply to the Immigration Officer reflects typical Middle Class pride and sentiment regarding their dignity and status, and regarding their own country, even though they think of immigrating to other countries for a better life.

Despite his spirited defence of his country and people, Yezad's disappointment finds expression in these words:

> Not much difference between there and here,… we have beggars in Bombay, they have people freezing to death in Toronto streets; instead of high- and low-caste fighting, racism and police shootings; separatists in Kashmir, separatists in Quebec- why migrate from the frying pan into the fire? (137)

Several years later when Yezad narrates the immigration story to his sons, his father-in-law Nariman, who, by that time, has shifted to their residence, expresses his happiness at their decision not to emigrate: "I think emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills" (254) . The Narimans and the Yezads do not want to live with 'a hole that never fills', and prefer to live in their own 'homes' and negotiate all the odds that come their way in life's struggle.

Although Yezad cherishes all "the ideals of the middle class – including moderation, deliberation and decency" (Dickey 572), and he is very much aware that "cleanliness and orderliness (which) are standard middle-class civic and domestic concerns, and (that these) are often cited by middle class people as distinguishing them from the urban poor" (577), it becomes more and more difficult for him, in his own country, to uphold these middle-class traits which he values most. His ailing father-in-law Nariman's stay at their residence adds to his financial stress. As Nariman's pension does not even cover the cost of his medicines, Roxana has to pay the medicine bill by making up the difference from housekeeping money. They have to apply middle class 'moderation' more strictly, and soon they have to compromise even with food and remain content with butterless toast, muttonless Irish stew and fishless dhandar paatiyo. But Yezad is very much saddened to sacrifice 'cleanliness and orderliness': the house which was once neat and clean now

bears a shabby look; there is foul smell all around; Yezad who hates foul smells and Roxana who is so particular about cleanliness become victims of circumstance. The front room is always smelly with Nariman's bedpan and urinal bottle sitting under the settee which serves as his bed.

At the same time there is acute dearth of space in the tiny flat to accommodate the entire family. Stress and overload of work affect Roxana's health and acute financial crisis leaves Yezad on the verge of depression.

> How time passed and changed things. For him too, the years were slipping away-nothing but the interminable tedium of one pointless day after another…was this all his life was ever going to be? Forty-three, and what had he accomplished?...the children growing up so fast-what did he have to offer them? Nothing. (*Family Matters* 213)

Mistry shows the humdrum reality and the everyday problems and anxieties of a middle class family in India.

In addition to the financial anxieties, the middle class people often get emotionally entangled, not without reason however, in the prevailing political situation. Yezad's sense of despair is further aggravated by the political situation of the time that shatters Bombay's reputation as a city of tolerance and communal eclecticism. Mistry has woven the personal financial insecurities of Yezad with the general insecurity of the minority communities of the city who have to bear the terror and trauma of Babri Mosque riot. The riot that takes place in Bombay immediately after the Babri Mosque demolition at Ayodhya, kills hundreds of people and makes thousands homeless.

A similar situation happened when the Prime Minister was assassinated some years earlier. Communal frenzy grips the atmosphere and disturbs the social equilibrium when some sensitive events happen. Keeping in view the fact that India is a country inhabited by people of different faiths – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc., secularism is enshrined as a state ideology in the Indian Constitution. But, very often, religious ideologies overwhelm the ideology of secularism. Hussain, the Muslim peon working in the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium becomes a victim of the riot, the traumatic images of that fateful day when his entire family perishes, always lingering in

his mind. Both Yezad and his employer Mr. Kapur, who are non-Muslims and practise different faiths, are compassionate towards Hussain who is a Muslim, and treat him with empathy during his periodical bouts of depression. But such localized communal harmony is overshadowed by mob sentiments.

For Mr. Kapur, Yezad is his "friend and confidant" (151) and they share views on the decaying system of the country. Both are critical of the rising power of the Shiv Sena, a socio-political party based on religious fervour, Hindu Majoritarianism or Hindutva, and regionalism, and they are saddened to notice the increasing influence of mafia dons and criminals in political and administrative matters, bringing a virtual collapse of the existing administrative system:

> Besides their abhorrence for the Shiv Sena and its narrow parochial ways, they shared a lament for the city they felt was slowly dying being destroyed by goonda raj and mafia dons, as the newspapers put it, "in an unholy nexus of politicians, criminals and police". (151)

Middle class anxieties coupled with prevailing political, administrative and social corruption make Yezad somewhat cynical, and he loses faith in the democratic system, and he expresses it to Nariman: "Frankly, I don't care who the government is, and what they do. I've given up on a savior. Always turns out to be a real savior-and–a-half". (32) Yezad's confession to Mr. Kapur is expressive of his loss of faith in democracy: "For the last seven or eight years, I haven't voted in any election – not local, not national". (161) A similar view is echoed when Rangarajan talks to Nariman: "The age when great leaders flowered among us is gone. We have a terrible draught." (54).

On the other hand, Mr. Kapur, being placed in a social class higher than that of Yezad, Nariman and Rangarajan, and having fewer anxieties, financial or otherwise, seems to be relaxed and sensible. Mr. Kapur has faith in the democratic system and in the city's benevolence. He recalls gratefully, and with pleasure, the story of how coming from Lahore, now in Pakistan, to the city during the partition of the country, his father started from scratch to become prosperous: "Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with zero, and became prosperous. Only city in the world where this is possible" (151).

For him the city which had offered shelter and a means of livelihood to his father, had become home, a site for human resilience and humane values.

It is the social class of the people that shapes and determines, very often, their attitudes, views and reactions regarding individual, social, political and administrative issues. Although, Mr. Kapur is aware that the 'once young and beautiful city' has now grown old and sick with 'blemishes' of corruption, crime and religious fundamentalism, he still loves the city and often uses the 'beautiful-woman metaphor' to describe the beauty of Bombay(361). In a gesture to do his bit of duty towards the city, Mr. Kapur expresses his desire to contest in the Municipal election. As a Municipal Councillor, Mr. Kapur explains to Yezad, he would try to remove the "blemishes" from the city: "My beloved Bombay is being raped", "I cannot stand by and watch the thugs" (158). However, for Yezad crime and corruption are more than the mere 'blemishes' Mr. Kapur refers to, these are 'cancerous tumours'(361). Mistry depicts how in course of time, Mr. Kapur too becomes a victim of this disease. It is a disease that turns "honest people into crooks" (31).

Personally, Yezad does not subscribe to Mr. Kapur's idea of contesting the Municipal election: he finds Mr.Kapur's idea quite impractical without having any prospect of wiping out the 'blemishes'. But Yezad's selfishness, grown out of middle class hardship, guides him to encourage Mr. Kapur to fight the election, in the hope of getting a raise in his salary if Mr. Kapur wins. Yezad contemplates the prospect of taking charge of Bombay Sporting as suggested by Mr. Kapur himself in order to be relieved of his business duties so that he can be free to devote his time to social work. Yezad dreams that an increase in salary would make it easier for him to adjust the household budget.

Unknowingly and innocently, Yezad oversteps his cherished moral values and enters into the world of moral corruption, and it becomes difficult for him to get out of this world. His worse days are already in the queue – things are not moving as smoothly as he expects: Coomy and Jal are not willing to take back their stepfather, his father-law Nariman. On one plea or another they are delaying their stepfather's shifting to Chateau Felicity. Financial problem is not the only reason for them - Coomy has an inherent hatred for her stepfather whom she holds responsible for her mother's unhappy marriage

and her subsequent accidental death. It becomes quite clear to Yezad that Nariman's three weeks stay at their residence would get extended indefinitely. Thus, in desperation to make some extra money to meet the increasing household expenses he tries his luck at the *Matka,* and to his surprise he even manages to win it initially. The *Matka Queen,* Villie Cardmaster helps him in bidding the numbers. Matka is the underground, and of course illegal, lottery that helps to fund the Shiv Sena machinery. It also finances the organized crime that has infected the city and its institutions. *Matka,* in fact is a "criminal scourge" (206) that has held Bombay in its grip. As Yezad's friend Vilas Rane observes: "Matka is Bombay and Bombay is Matka" (207). Gradually Yezad falls into the web of corrupt practices. Circumstances challenge his honesty and integrity of character.

To improve his financial condition, Yezad is now desperately hoping of Mr. Kapur contesting the Municipal election. But to his great disappointment and surprise one day Mr. Kapur informs him that he is not going to contest the election as his wife has said that elections are "nothing better than fights between gangsters"(295). So it seems that Mr. Kapur comes to his senses, but Yezad feels "anger and betrayal" and also "a sense of hopelessness" (295). Later, Yezad reminds him of his civic duty to which Mr. Kapur replies:

> Think about it- pure duty is unconcerned with outcome. Even if I become a municipal councilor, fight the good fight, what do I have at the end? The satisfaction of knowing I've done my duty. As far as Bombay is concerned, nothing changes. Nobody can turn back the clock. (302)
>
> A municipal councillor tackling corruption is like a penknife trying to dig up a banyan tree. (329)

Ironically, Mr. Kapur, who has been an ardent critic of corruption, gradually falls prey to corrupt practices. Every day, just before closing time, Yezad hands over to his employer Mr. Kapur the cash payments of the day for which no invoices or receipts have been issued – a corrupt practice indeed. Mr. Kapur refers to unaccounted money as the "suitcase money". Two honest persons have been transformed to corrupt persons – one, Mr. Kapur, because of his frustration that honesty and integrity can bring no change to the unhealthy system, and the other, Yezad, because of his realization that honesty and integrity are no solution to middle class hardship.

Mistry shows that corruption is one of the most serious problems in India; the seeds of corruption are sown quite early in one's life – even in the schools where the future citizens of the country are shaped and moulded. Jehangir, operating from the power position of a class homework monitor overlooks his classmates' mistakes by taking money. Even Yezad, whom Mr. Kapur trusts wholeheartedly and says, "I don't need to worry about cash sticking to the lining of your trousers" (156), is tempted to take the envelope containing money meant for the fake Shiv Sainiks, and employ his friend Vilas and others as a ploy to threaten and instigate his employer Mr. Kapur to reconsider his decision of not contesting the municipal election. But later real Shiv Sainiks come to Mr. Kapur and ask him to change the name of his shop from Bombay to Mumbai, an example of regionalism. Mr. Kapur gets furious as he thinks that he has been double crossed because he has already promised to pay Shiv Sainiks (the fake ones deployed by Yezad) to retain the name of his shop. An altercation ensues and Mr. Kapur pays the heaviest price; he loses his life.

This incident gives Yezad a great shock combined with guilt for having been indirectly responsible for what happened:

> He'd been able to think of nothing but his scheming with Vilas (his friend) and the actors, blaming them, blaming himself for what had happened to Mr. Kapur … poor man, needlessly dead … no wonder he thought he was being double crossed when the real Shiv Sainiks came … but who knew that they would ? (405)

Once the entire Chenoy family was proud of the heroic display of honesty and sincerity by Yezad's father at the time of World War II – amidst chaos and panic caused by wartime explosions, Yezad's father ensured the safe delivery of a large consignment of money to the bank for which he worked. For his bravery, the bank Chairman gifted him a commemorative clock with the engraving, *In gratitude for an exemplary display of courage and honesty in the course of duty (232).* Yezad carefully preserved and cherished this gift, and he would remind his sons: "Remember, people can take everything away from you, but they cannot rob you of your decency…You alone can do that, by your actions."(234) But now, an acute sense of guilt overwhelms him, and he goes in search of ways to undo the sins committed by him by deviating from the lofty

ideals of honesty and integrity his father followed all his life. He decides to take refuge in his religious faith, in the *fire temple* which becomes his 'sanctuary' (358).

The more he is drawn into religious thought, the more he becomes cynical towards the outer world. When he loses his job after Mr. Kapur's death, Yezad becomes a totally changed person. He feels humiliated when Mrs. Kapur hands him a month's extra salary before dismissing him from his job. "Yezad wondered if his own father was now watching his son's humiliation" (427). It is a turning point in Yezad's life - from a liberal Parsi, he turns into an orthodox Zoroastrian. Mr. Kapur's death symbolizes the threat to secularism and nationalism by fundamentalism and regionalism in India. Mr. Kapur, a man who abhorred religious fundamentalism, and wanted to make his shop "a mini-Bombay" (159), celebrating different religious festivals conveying "the spirit of tolerance" (159), himself became in the end a victim of religious intolerance and ugly regionalism.

When Yezad realizes that the things are getting out of his hands, he gets very much disturbed mentally; he starts believing in the influence of a cosmic hand between every cause and effect. Yezad's orthodoxy makes him believe that all events in a man's life are controlled by destiny – he ascribes the events, like the pushing of Nariman into the Chenoys' care, Coomy's accidental death, the shifting of the Chenoy family to Chateau Felicity and Nariman developing bed sores that ultimately cause his death, to destiny and destiny alone. He becomes an active member of an orthodox Zoroastrian association, and his orthodoxy gradually takes a form of religious obstinacy. His orthodoxy even pushes him to indulge in prescribing some rigid and orthodox practices to be followed by his wife during her menstrual periods, and strongly disapproving Murad's closeness with a non-Parsi girlfriend. What Yezad fails to realize is that by becoming a pure and orthodox Parsi, he himself becomes a fundamentalist like those Shiv Sainiks whom he loathed previously. But religious orthodoxy fails to bring happiness to his mind. Jehangir describes his father's change as a change from a carefree, jovial "real father" to a "non-stop-praying stranger" (500). Though Roxana is constantly concerned about the happiness of her family, it seems in the end that the concepts of goodness and happiness are not necessarily similar. What Mistry asserts in the novel is that religious orthodoxy

can sometimes rescue one from utter mental depression but it cannot certainly bring permanent happiness to his/her life.

Both the novels, *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters*, revolve around well-knit Parsi families squeezed by middle class problems and anxieties, and the tensions due to the prevailing economic, political and social conditions in post-Independence India. In the first novel there are descriptions of a war fought by India with her neighbour, and its emotional and economic effects on the people. Gustad, an honest and naïve family man, thinking all along of smooth management and welfare of his family, is very much stressed because of three things: Firstly, the feeling of being degraded to the middle class living with scarcity while his grandfather lived in abundance is a source of constant unhappiness to Gustad. This feeling of Gustad finds expression in the dream he dreams of his grandfather's days. He is always under tension when he strives hard to maintain, if not improve, the standard of living of his family. All throughout his struggle for a respectable life, Gustad tries to adhere stubbornly to some ideals like honesty and integrity. But he is pained to realize that honesty and integrity do not always pay. Secondly, his hopes of ensuring a bright future for his son Sohrab are shattered when his son refuses to take admission in the IIT after successfully competing for a seat there. Gustad strongly believes that a degree from the IIT would have ensured a bright, hassle-free and comfortable future for his son, and he wishes to fulfill his own unfulfilled dreams through Sohrab as every middle class father does. Gustad is deeply hurt to find that the attitude and thinking of his son in this regard are diametrically opposite to those of his, and his son never tries to understand him. Thirdly, the prevailing political atmosphere very much disturbs him; although the euphoria created by the Bangladesh war which is a political consequence, initially makes him feel a national pride he gradually begins to question the ultimate gain such a war brings to the people and the nation. He is utterly frustrated and disappointed to know how such a war can bring corruption of the highest order at the highest level of the political hierarchy, and how a person like him can also be entangled in others' corruption. He realizes that the people like him, and of his class, happen to be the worst sufferers. Gustad's pride of nationalism gradually dies down.

Like the first novel, *Family Matters,* also highlights the hard struggle for survival of middle class families with a host of financial and other problems. But, at the same time the novel depicts how deeply a middle class person can be concerned to uphold certain ideals like honesty and integrity, how deviation from such ideals, however under compulsions, can bring such an acute guilty consciousness that changes the person drastically. The novel also exposes the ugly face of fundamentalism and regionalism which threaten secularism and nationalism.

Yezad is basically a good man, cherishing all the high ideals people talk about. He dreams of a clean society, a clean political system, a clean administration, and he works hard and sincerely and honestly to maintain his family. But he is overburdened, and his financial burden becomes too heavy for him. To have some relief he begins to engage himself in some corrupt practices as recourse to his financial hardship. Unfortunately, because of a ploy adopted by him for his personal benefit costs the life of his employer being a victim of fundamentalism and regionalism. Yezad comes to realize that he is deviating from the ideals which he learns to value and cherish from his father. His basic honesty and sharp sensitivity remind him that he has begun to tread along the wrong path, and he begins to feel that his conscience is against what he is doing. Acute depression grips Yezad's mind – the cause of his depression is his failure to uphold his cherished ideals. Ultimately his depression makes him cynically religious – he completely surrenders to his religious faith to get some solace and mental peace.

Through the struggles and the ideals of the middle class people, Rohinton Mistry focuses on some important contemporary issues – damaging effects of war on the people and the nation, crippling effects of corruption at all levels and in all fronts, rising influence of fundamentalism and regionalism in different social and political matters.