

Journey with Metaphors: Such a Long Journey

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Abstract:

*Bombay, the city where Rohinton Mistry spent his initial years of life, features prominently in almost all his works. Bombay is Mistry's landscape, the canvas on which he paints the details of his character's anguish, joy and pathos. Mistry's Bombay is enigmatic and projects itself in various ways externally. Beauty and ugliness are found side by side in his depiction of this city. Bombay is not just a physical reality but instead becomes a continuing metaphor in all his writings. This paper deals with Mistry's delineation of the great city Bombay at a metaphorical level in his novel *Such a Long Journey*. The people, places, activities, noises etc. provide the connecting link to the happenings of this novel. The specific landmarks of the city of Bombay become recurring but varied metaphors all through the book.*

Keywords: *Bombay, city, metaphor, landmark, journey*

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Rohinton Mistry, an Indian born writer belonging to Parsi community, was born in 1952 and grew up in Bombay, where he graduated from Mumbai university with a B. Sc. despite his interest in literature and arts. After spending 23 years of his life in India, he immigrated to Canada in 1975 to become a pop singer. In order to survive in Canada, he took up a bank job and studied part time in the evening for a degree in English and philosophy at the University of Toronto. In 1983, he sent a short story, *One Sunday* to the Hart House Literary Contest, and won the first prize. The following year, he sent *Auspicious Occasions* to the same contest and won again. That is how he began his literary career.

Bombay, the city where Rohinton Mistry spent his initial years of life, features prominently in almost all his works including *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002). Many Indian writers have set their stories in Bombay. Writers like Salman Rashdie, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Shobha De, Firdaus Kanga etc. have either used Bombay as the backdrop for their stories or have explored the city's individual makers- the film industry, underworld and Parsis. Even for writers outside the country like John Irving and Leslie Forbes, Bombay provided a ready metaphor for contemporary India. Whether celebrating Bombay's chaotic plurality or lamenting the lack of graspable totality, each of these writers depict the multi faceted nature of the city. Bombay is Mistry's landscape, the canvas on which he paints the details of his character's anguish, joy and pathos. Mistry's Bombay is enigmatic and projects itself in various ways externally. Beauty and ugliness are found side by side in his depiction of this city.

The word 'metaphor' derived from 'meta' meaning 'over' and 'pherein' means 'to carry'. It refers to a particular set of linguistic process whereby aspects of one subject are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first. There are various types of metaphors, and the number of 'objects' involved can vary but the general procedure of 'transference' remains the same. Bombay is not just a physical reality but instead becomes a continuing metaphor in all his writings. This paper deals with Mistry's delineation of the great city Bombay at a metaphorical level in his novel *Such a Long Journey*.

The first important landmark of the city is Crawford Market. It is perhaps one of the most widely known and durably useful of all the buildings conceived at this period. It was the brain-child of Sir Arthur Crawford. Today, Crawford Market houses cool and comfortable high meat, fish and vegetable markets.

Crawford Market is a metaphor for a dirty, smelly and overcrowded place.

In Crawford Market, the floors are slippery with animal ooze and vegetable waste. We see the cavernous hall of meat which is dark and forbidden with huge, wicked-looking meat hooks hanging from the ceiling. Butchers try various tacks to snare a customer and boast of the excellence of their meat. When Gustad goes to the Crawford Market to buy meat, he sees:

In the dim light and smelly air abuzz with bold and bellicose flies, everything acquired a menacing edge: the butchers' voices hoarse from their incessant bellowing; the runnels of sweat steaming down their faces and bare arms on to their sticky, crimson-stained vests and loongis; the sight and smell of blood and bone; and the constant, sinister flash of a meat cleaver or butcher's knife which, more often than not, was brandished in the vendor's wild hand as he bargained and gesticulated (Mistry 21).

It is depicted as a decaying and unwelcoming place. It can also be interpreted as a den of scoundrels, a space of violence and slaughter, of motley crowds and sacrificed animals, of victims and butchers. Gustad's father used to relish the trip to the Crawford Market:

To venture boldly into the den of scoundrels, as he called it; then to badger and bargain with the shopkeepers, tease and mock them, their produce, their habits, but always preserving the correct tone that trod the narrow line between badinage and belligerence; and finally, to emerge unscathed and triumphant, banner held high, having got the better of the rogues (Mistry 20).

Crawford Market can also be seen as a meeting place, a place where various types of people come from various places and meet each other: "...Crawford Market's façade, faithfully keeping the hours for butchers and pet-shop owners, merchants and black-marketeers, shoppers and beggars, all under one vast roof" (Mistry 223).

Butchers of Crawford Market can be seen as cruel and barbaric people. As Gustad's grandmother warns him: "Never argue with a goaswalla...If he loses his temper, then bhup! He will stick you with his knife. Won't stop to even think about it... Remember, the goaswalla's whole life, his training, his occupation, is about butchering" (Mistry 21).

Another important landmark of Bombay is Flora Fountain. The official Modern name of Flora Fountain is Hutatma Chowk. It was designed by a committee that included R. Norman Shaw, though it doesn't look like it, and was erected in honour of Bartle Frere, the Governor responsible for laying out much of the post-1860 'new Bombay', which is now so thoroughly ensconced in the patina of time lying on its Gothic surfaces. At the main intersection of Flora Fountain, the great

traffic radiates five roads like giant pulsating tentacles. The traffic becomes a metaphor for recklessness and indiscipline. As Dinshawji describes:

Cars were pulling out from inside the traffic island and recklessly leaping into the flow. The BEST buses, red and double-deckered, careened dangerously around the circle on their way to Colaba. Intrepid handcarts, fueled by muscle and bone, competed temerarily against the best that steel, petrol and vulcanized rubber threw in their paths (Mistry 73).

This traffic of vehicles and humans can be viewed as an endless meaningless cycle of life without a known destination or goal. When Gustad and Dinshawji walked past the traffic they saw:

Like a vast river that had reversed its direction, the current was speeding northward- northward, the flow of tired humanity,... the weary flow, by crush of bus, by squeeze of train, by rattle of bicycle, by ache of feet-northward to suburbs and slums, to houses, hovels, apartments, tenements... till the current petered out, its waters still but not restful, lying in darkness, trying to scrounge enough strength to prepare for the morning tide southward, and the repetition of the endless cycle (Mistry 179).

The traffic circle looks like a great motionless wheel:

With the dead fountain at its still centre, the traffic circle lay like a great motionless wheel, while around it whirled the business of the city on its buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, rattling, banging, screaming, throbbing, rumbling, grumbling, sighing, never-ending journey through the metropolis (Mistry 73).

Another place worthy of mention is the Chor Bazzar which is a metaphor for chaos and hubbub. We see people bargaining and buying things from roadside stalls and pavement sellers. When Gustad visits Chor Bazzar he sees “...the maze of narrow lanes and byways...where to begin? And so many people everywhere – locals, tourists, foreigners, treasure hunters, antique collectors, junk dealers, browsers.” (Mistry 99).

It can also be interpreted as a place of commerce littered with a miscellany of goods:

... the series of lanes running perpendicular to the main road, all littered with a miscellany of goods, as though a convoy of lorries had symmetrically spilled their loads. Much of it was metal and glass...worthless junk lay side by side with valuable objects: chipped cups and saucers, Meissen ware, Sheffield cutlery, vases, brass lamps, Limoges porcelain, solder-repaired cooking utensils...(Mistry 101).

Chor Bazaar can also be considered as an open library where we can find valuable books at a reasonable rate. It becomes a place where one can get practical training on how to live. In Chor Bazaar Gustad:

...came upon a collection more respectable than any he had seen so far. A richly bound *Great Dialogues of Plato*, volume seven of the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, and Henry Gray's Anatomy of the Human Body... Very good books... very difficult to find. Only in Chor Bazaar you can find (Mistry 102).

Bombay is presented as an educational heaven as it is a House for many esteemed and reputed educational Institutes. The Indian Institute of Technology is a promised land for students in Bombay. Most of parents dream of their children studying IIT in Bombay:

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 given and all things would be possible and all things would come to pass for he who journeyed there and emerged with the sacred chalice (Mistry 66-67).

Many areas in Bombay are overcrowded, squalid and uninhabitable places and can be seen as metaphors of the congestion characteristic of all metropolises. Dr. Paymaster's dispensary was located in such an area:

...a neighbourhood that had changed in recent years from a place of dusty, unobtrusive poverty to a bustling, overcrowded, and still dusty, nub of commerce. Crumbling, leaky warehouses and rickety-staired, wobbly-balconied tenements had been refurbished and upgraded, from squalid and uninhabitable to squalid and temporarily habitable. The sewer system remained unchanged, broken and overflowing. Water supply continued to be a problem. So did rats, garbage and street lighting (Mistry 155).

Bombay is a metaphor for an ever changing, ephemeral place. With the passing of time, everything keeps on changing. Even the road names keep changing frequently. Dinshawji's laments on the change of street names bring forth the notion of displacement:

I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared; in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it's on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes (Mistry 74).

Likewise Bombay cinema houses typify the world of glitz and glamour. People's unrealized dreams get fulfilled through movies. Once when Gustad was passing through the crossroads, he saw:

...the cinema billboard lights blaze in the dusking sky. Synchronized bulbs flashed around gigantic cut-outs of hero and heroine, guardians of the city's evening chaos; behind them loomed a bearded villain, nastily twisting his villainous lips (Mistry 199).

Cinema house is also considered as a Mecca for Black-Marketeers. When a new film arrives, it rouses the neighbourhood and awakens the industry that is seldom fast asleep:

Black-Marketeers and scalpers began buzzing around the theatres, brominating ceaselessly... Ten-for-five, ten-for-five, ten-for-five...Price ratios could keep soaring, depending on the stars and the number of songs on the sound track. The black-market usually slowed after the first mad rush, then lay dormant like larvae waiting to hatch with the next celluloid release (Mistry 156).

In Bombay, the pavement becomes places for earning livelihood for people like pavement artists and beggars. When Gustad and Dinshawji decided to walk down Vir Nariman Road, they saw a pavement artist at the corner of a pavement. As he drew the drawings of the various Gods and Goddesses people were worshipping and throwing money at pictures: "At the corner a pavement artist sat cross-legged beside his crayon drawings of gods and goddesses. He got up now and then to collect the coins left by devotees" (Mistry 73).

The square of pavement can be looked as a hallowed ground because:

The pavement artist did not restrict himself to any single religion- one day it was elephant-headed Ganesh, giver of wisdom and success; next day, it could be Christ hanging on the cross; and the office crowds blissfully tossed coins upon the pictures – Pedestrians were careful with this square of pavement, this hallowed ground as long as it displayed deity of the day (Mistry 143).

Bombay is a metaphor for the city of God. The black wall near Gustad's house was used as a public latrine by ignorant people. But when Gustad made the pavement artist draw the paintings of various deities and Gods on it, people started worshipping the same wall:

Over the next few days, the wall filled up with Gods, prophets and saints...Mosquitoes and flies were no longer quite the nuisance they used to

be... The holy countenances on the wall – some grim and vengeful, some jovial, some compassionate, others frightful and awe-inspiring, yet kind and avuncular-watched over the road, the traffic, the passers-by, day and night. Natraj did his cosmic dance, a Brahma lifted his axe high above Issac, Mary cradled the Infant Jesus, Laxmi dispensed wealth, Sarswati spread wisdom and learning (Mistry 183-184).

The beaches of Bombay can be seen as a metaphor for a peaceful place. When the people of Bombay get bored of the fast life of the city, they go to the sea beach to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere. The beach takes away all their worries and tensions from their life. When Malcolm and Gustad passed through the sea, they "...glimpsed slices of the sea, coruscating like shards of a mirror. The rocky beach became visible now, shining hot and black in the sun...It's so pleasant to sit on the rocks when the tide comes in with the breeze. So peaceful" (Mistry 226).

But to Mistry the beach is not always peaceful and calm. Contrary to this, a place called Mahim Creek is a dirty and smelly place. At Mahim Causeway the road curves over a substantial and permanently odorous creek before entering the dusty booth-lined main road of Bombay itself, the visitor is apt to be feeling queasy, intimidated and culture-shocked. When Gustad was travelling by train: "The train passed over Mahim Creek, and the stink of raw sewage mingled with salty sea smells made them wrinkle their noses" (Mistry 224).

Railway stations and trains constitute the life line of Bombay. Like Calcutta's Howrah Bridge, Bombay's Victoria Terminus symbolizes the metropolis. Victoria Terminus is a gateway for 'incomers' and 'out goers'. When Gustad arrived at Victoria Terminus he saw "Red-shirted porters with thick, head-cushioning turbans... Nearby, the questions of hordes of disgruntled travellers were being fielded by white-jacketed official who kept removing his black-visored white cap to rub his forehead" (Mistry 255).

It can also be seen as a noisy and chaotic place. The trains and passengers keep on coming and going ceaselessly which results in chaos and confusion on the station:

The loudspeakers came alive with violent hissing and cracking, then a high-pitched hum. A hush descended upon the railway station. The tea-stall clatter ceased; the newsstand boys stopped the bedding... Then the voice again, hoarse and indistinct, the malfunctioning system devouring most of the words... 'Passengers are req... to arrive...at which time...passengers with tickets may...platforms' (Mistry 257)

The city can also be looked as a city in turmoil. Gustad abandoned going to Crawford

Market because of the fear of riots and bloodshed. Sometimes a peaceful rally could lead to violent bloodshed. Gustad once experienced the same. He saw:

A vast congregation of sadhus wielding staffs, tridents, and various other equally sanctified religious instruments, staged a demonstration outside Parliament House to protest against cow slaughter. Familiar with modern trends in political campaigning and public relations, they also brought along a herd of cows. Slogans were raised, banners unfurled, curses showered on government personnel; drums, bells, horns, cymbals added to the clamour; and the gentle creatures in their midst began lowing nervously. The wrath of gods was invoked upon the murderers of sacred Gomata, and suddenly, quite inexplicably, the gathering turned violent. The police opened fire. Cows and sadhus stampeded. Staffs and tridents, hooves and horns, bullets and truncheons, all took their toll (Mistry 221).

Bombay life becomes a metaphor for worries, disappointments and betrayals. People live very fast life in Bombay and they face many problems. Gustad's life is also tormented by worries, tensions and betrayals. For him:

It was becoming too much to bear, Roshan's sickness, Dilnawaz blaming him for potassium permanganate, Jimmy's treachery, Dinshawji's stupidity, Laurie's complaint, Sohrab's betrayal, nothing but worry and sorrow and disappointment piling up around him, walling him in, threatening to crush him (Mistry 177).

Gustad becomes a metaphor for 'Everyman' in contemporary society who seems to prove the well known lines- "Like flies to wanton boys/Are we to the Gods/They kill us for their sport" (Shakespeare).

The city is a harsh, merciless place. There is a lot of competition for jobs. It is very difficult to get a job without influence. People take up government jobs because there is security of getting steady income even if the work is boring. As Malcolm Saldhanha says:

Bloody boring municipality. How he hated his job, but was also grateful for it- steady income, thanks to uncle's influence. This bloody city, turning into harsh, merciless place. Regular salary was a powerful lure. No bloody security with piano tuitions,...(Mistry 319).

Bombay stands for commercialization of everything. It is a very expensive city. We cannot pass even a single day without having sufficient money. The cost of living is very high in Bombay so the poor and the middle class people depend on ration cards. Gustad's family could afford to buy the fine creamy product of Parsi Dairy Farm

before the prices started to go up. But after sometime they endlessly await their milk ration card from the government office and buy the milk from local Bhaiya.

To conclude, in Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* Bombay as a whole appears as a place of chaos, confusion, ambiguity and unbearable congestion which is evident from places like Crawford Market, Victoria Terminus, Flora Fountain and Cinema Houses. On the other hand a metaphor of the beautiful sea beach with all its calmness, tranquillity and serenity seems to engulf in itself all the chaos and confusion of the place. It is very ironical that Mistry describes Bombay as an educational heaven with all its educational institutions and at the same time he degrades its people by pointing out the lack of civic sense as well as their superstitions, blind faith and necromancy through the example of Mrs. Kutpitia in the novel. Bombay is thus never a physical reality or a geographical entity. Instead it reveals its multi-faceted character in the innumerable variety of metaphors that Mistry is able to endow it with.

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