

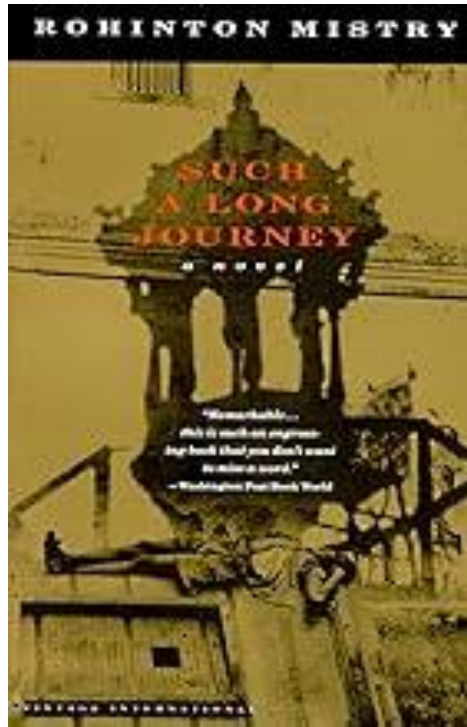
## Exploring Identity and Psychoanalysis in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*: A Study of Individual and Societal Influences

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### Abstract

Rohinton Mistry in his novel *Such a Long Journey*, explores the struggles of individuals in maintaining their sense of self amid societal pressures, family expectations, and personal aspirations. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, it is clear to visualize insight into the conscious and unconscious drives that shape the actions, thoughts, and relationships of the characters. This

paper seeks to analyse the nuanced portrayal of identity formation, family dynamics, workplace influences, and societal impacts within the framework of psychoanalytic theory. It also delves into the intricate interplay between individual psychology, familial dynamics, and societal pressures.

**Keywords:** Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey*, struggles, family dynamics, psychology, psychoanalysis

## **Introduction**

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is a celebrated novel that provides a detailed exploration of human behaviour, identity, and psychological complexity within the realms of family, society, and selfhood. As one of the most prolific contemporary authors, Mistry captures the essence of individuals navigating the multifaceted challenges of life while seeking a sense of belonging and self-definition. Set against the socio-political backdrop of India in the 1970s, the novel allows readers to delve into the intricate inner lives of its characters, making it a compelling text for psychoanalytic interpretation. delves into the intricate interplay between individual psychology, familial dynamics, and societal pressures. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the novel offers profound insights into the complexities of human behaviour and the enduring struggle to reconcile competing desires and needs within the fabric of society. Jhabwala writes, "The concept of the family rests on the happiness of the heart and contentment of the mind. It has but little to do with how you live or what you earn. Only that you must. It is but a psychological question." (Jhabwala 78, 79).

The family in this novel serves as a microcosm for examining broader social issues and the intricate web of human connections. Mistry's nuanced character development allows readers to empathize with everyone's struggles and triumphs, highlighting the psychological underpinnings that drive their actions. By exploring the intricate layers of the characters' psyches, the novel provides valuable insights into the ways in which personal and collective experiences influence behaviour and relationships. The novel *Such a Long Journey* not only tells a compelling story but also invites readers to reflect on the deeper psychological forces at play in the lives of its characters, making it a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of human relationships and society.

## **Identity Formation and the Role of the Family**

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Personal identity is central to Mistry's narrative, shaped by a blend of internal desires and external demands. Gustad Noble, the protagonist in the novel *Such a Long Journey*, exemplifies the complex formation of identity as he juggles multiple roles within his family and community. His identity as a father, husband, friend, and employee encompasses a spectrum of expectations, each contributing to his perception of self.

One of the most prominent aspects of Gustad's identity is his relationship with his son, Sohrab. Gustad's aspirations for Sohrab to attend the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) reflect his desire to secure a stable and prosperous future for his son. However, Sohrab's reluctance to follow his father's path reveals a generational conflict that disrupts Gustad's vision of familial unity. This father-son dynamic highlights a psychological struggle between imposed identities and personal autonomy, a theme central to psychoanalytic theory. Sohrab's resistance is an assertion of his own emerging identity, defying Gustad's expectations to establish his unique selfhood. 'Why can't you just accept it? IIT does not interest me it was never my idea, you made all the plans. I told you I'm going to change to the arts program, I like my college, and all my friends here'.

Gustad could not contain himself no longer. 'Friends? Friends? Don't talk to me your friends! If you have good reasons, I will listen. But don't say friends! You must be blind if you cannot see my own example and learn from it' (48-49 *SLJ*)

Through psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freudian concepts, this conflict reflects the tension between the ego and the superego. Gustad's superego, which embodies societal and familial expectations, clashes with Sohrab's emerging ego, symbolizing the desires for self-expression and individual identity. This father-son relationship represents a psychological tug-of-war, in which both parties grapple with the need for understanding and acceptance. "Gustad's own ambition was diminishing and unfulfilled, so it led him to hope that his spoilt ambition will be fulfilled by his elder son Sohrab." (507 Ram Lalit)

## Identity and Professional Context

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Mistry also examines the workplace as a site of identity negotiation and self-expression. Gustad's relationship with his colleague, Dinshawji, provides a humorous yet insightful look at how identities are shaped and negotiated in a professional setting. Dinshawji, with his satirical humour and unorthodox behaviour, contrasts with Gustad's more restrained and conscientious demeanour. For instance, Dinshawji's playful description of his wife as a "domestic vulture" and his unconventional habit of bringing leftovers to work in a briefcase reflect his unique outlook on life and his attempts to lighten the stress of everyday life.

In a psychoanalytic framework, Dinshawji's humor and nonconformity serve as coping mechanisms that allow him to manage the monotony and pressures of his job. Through the lens of Freud's id, ego, and superego, Dinshawji's behavior exemplifies a balance between his id's desire for amusement and the ego's awareness of social boundaries. Gustad, in contrast, embodies the superego's adherence to societal norms, which occasionally constrains his ability to freely express his emotions.

### **Societal Influence on Identity Formation**

Set during a period of political and social turmoil, the novel underscores the profound impact of societal forces on personal identity. The socio-political climate of 1970s India, marked by political corruption, communal tensions, and economic hardship, looms over the characters' lives, shaping their perceptions and actions. For Gustad, these external pressures compound his personal anxieties, intensifying his need to protect his family and assert control over his life.

Mistry's depiction of societal influence is further enhanced by the minority status of the Parsi community, which forms the backdrop for much of Gustad's experiences. The political and cultural tensions faced by the Parsi community amplify Gustad's sense of vulnerability, shaping his identity as a protective and resilient family man. This theme resonates with psychoanalytic concepts, particularly Jungian theories of collective identity. Gustad's identity is not solely defined by his individual psyche but is also shaped by the shared experiences, fears, and values of his cultural community.

## **Psychoanalytic Interpretation: Conscious and Unconscious Motivations**

The novel's characters grapple with both conscious desires and unconscious motivations, reflecting the depth of their psychological complexity. Gustad's conscious desire to ensure his family's well-being and Sohrab's success is juxtaposed with his unconscious fears of failure and societal disapproval. This internal conflict aligns with Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego. Gustad's superego represents his internalized values and societal expectations, while his id harbours his unspoken anxieties and desires.

Similarly, other characters exhibit unconscious motivations that drive their actions. Dilnawaz, Gustad's wife, demonstrates her protective instincts through superstitions, guided by the belief that ritualistic actions can shield her family from harm. Her reliance on superstitions reflects an unconscious need to exert control over unpredictable circumstances, providing her with a sense of security amidst the uncertainties of life. This behaviour can be analysed through psychoanalysis as an expression of the ego's attempt to manage fears that the conscious mind cannot directly address.

## **Resolution and Transformation of Identity**

As the novel reaches its conclusion, Sohrab's reconciliation with his father symbolizes a significant transformation in both characters' identities. This reunion illustrates the healing potential of acceptance and understanding, as both father and son set aside their egos to embrace mutual compassion. The reunion reflects the necessity of reconciling conscious and unconscious motivations, as the characters come to terms with their desires, fears, and responsibilities. "Another tragic event that upsets Gustad Noble extremely is his son Shorab's strange behaviour. Shorab's action breaks his heart when Shorab utterly refuses to enroll himself as an IIT student ... Gustad Noble has great expectations for his son Shorab's future prosperity. But his dreams are shattered. when Shorab's violent tempers spoils the 9th birthday of his dear daughter Roshan, culminating in his desertion of his home." (Jaydipsinh K Dodiya 9)

In psychoanalytic terms, the resolution between Gustad and Sohrab represents an integration of the superego's moral constraints with the id's desires for connection and emotional fulfillment. The bond between father and son illustrates the importance of compromise and

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emotional openness in sustaining family relationships, underscoring the psychological resilience that arises from empathy and acceptance.

## Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* presents a compelling exploration of identity, family dynamics, and societal influence through the lens of psychoanalysis. Mistry masterfully examines the interplay between personal desires, societal expectations, and familial roles, highlighting the complexities of human relationships in the context of psychological theory. By portraying characters who navigate the tensions between their conscious and unconscious motivations, Mistry underscores the universal quest for self-understanding and connection.

The novel's exploration of identity formation offers valuable insights into the psychological underpinnings of human behaviour, illustrating how individuals forge their identities within the intricate web of personal, familial, and societal influences. Through its richly drawn characters and nuanced portrayal of family and society, *Such a Long Journey* invites readers to reflect on the enduring impact of psychoanalysis on literature, psychology, and the human experience.

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