

THE MAJOR ERRORS OF THE PROTAGONIST IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S SUCH A LONG JOURNEY : A GENERAL SEMANTICS EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

Human life is beset with so many problems at different levels. It is impossible for any human beings to exist without facing problems in their life; mostly these problems are based upon the misevaluation of the individuals about the problems, surroundings, and their sufferings. General Semantics presents an uncommon approach to living and solving the problems of life through 'structural differential' method and using extensional devices like: 'dating', 'indexing', 'etc', 'hyphens', 'quotes', etc. Through acquiring the different approaches/devices of GS, one can avoid and solve problems better, and improve to relate and communicate. Rohinton Mistry's Such A Long Journey illustrates the problems of Gustad Noble, a bank clerk, and his family due to economic, political, and cultural surroundings. Gustad is an ordinary man and faces many trials in his life. He has his own dreams about the future but his aspirations crumble down like cards. He struggles with memories of a financially secure and emotionally stable past that serves to highlight his family's current struggles, which shows his 'time-binding' capacity. He has also many semantic blocks which seizes his creatial thinking. The present study tries to find out the semantic blocks of Gustad and also provides the tools which can help him to resolve the problems. Consequently the present study tries to add one more dimension to look at the text and the struggles/problems of Gustad and his family and other characters through the lens of General Semantics approach.

Key words: *Human problems, General Semantics, Structural Differential, Time-binding, Semantic block.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the present era human being faces many problems in their life due to professional pressure, personal conflicts and internal and external forces like politics, religion, economy, caste, etc. Problems are the core part of human being, sometime because of their greedy, egoistical, stubborn, narrow mindedness nature, or sometime their half knowledge of the surroundings. They want to get rid of them but now and then their own misevaluation of situations or problems lead them to disaster. As it is often quoted that literature is the reflection of the society; it is the medium through which one

presents his/her personal, professional, societal and the surrounding problems of life-death, happiness-sorrow, real-artificial, nature-culture, etc.

Rohinton Mistry, a Diaspora writer through his works presents the problems of Parsi community like their nature, culture, history, issues of identity as an emigrant, etc. However, he presents economical problems, political problems of 1970s, personal problems of day-to-day life, etc. One can find the real picture of India (1970s) through his works whether it is politics or human affair. His each novel presents the issues/problems of Parsis with the

background of politics. Similarly in *Such a Long Journey* (1991) he discusses the problems of Gustad Noble and his family with the surroundings of economical and political hegemony. Gustad's problems are mainly based on his stubbornness and his misvaluation and sometimes over-evaluation of the situations and things. General Semantics as a problem solving system suggests the ways to overcome such situations with the help of different devices of evaluation. Consequently through this theory it is an attempt to find out the reasons behind Gustad's behaviour and his failure as a father and study the conflicts/problems of his life.

GENERAL SEMANTICS THEORY

General Semantics (GS) is a 'process – oriented problem solving system' which helps people to take right decision through the quest of consciousness of abstracting process, which is defined by Korzybski as basic goal of general semantics; using our human ability to function with awareness of how we get information, symbolize it, and communicate it to others and improves how we function individually, in groups, and cultures (212) and also using extensional devices (indexing, dating, using ETC, using hyphens, using quotes) and one's own time-binding capacity, which is described by Korzybski as the potential for each generation to start where the last generation left off. In other words, it is the potential for individuals to learn from their own and other people's experiences. (214) The founder of this theory is Alfred Korzybski (1879 – 1950), a Polish engineer and intellect who came to United States during World War I. He had a firsthand experience of death and human follies in the war, and then decided to give the proper ways to evaluate human behaviour and avoid conflicts in their life. Korzybski, as a keen observer of human behaviour noted that we have not been fully successful in dealing with our social and

psychological issues. So, he endeavoured to develop a 'self-help' system to help individuals and groups to make more intelligent decisions in all aspects of their lives and called it General Semantics. He too argued that human knowledge of the world is limited both by human nervous system and the language human developed and so that one cannot have direct access to reality, the most we can know is that which is filtered through the brains responses to reality. To live happily, he recommend to 'observe' and 'evaluate' the situation around us, takes the help of our past experiences and behave sanely with every minute problem of life. Korzybski in his *Manhood of Humanity* (1921) and *Science and Sanity* (1933) competed human progress (time-binding) largely as a result of its more flexible nervous system that was capable to 'symbolize' and 'abstract' in endless orders. A wide variety of writers, educators, therapists, and other professionals have drawn on and added to GS theory; they not only contribute but also simplify Korzybski's ideas relatively. Notable contributors are: Bruce I. Kodish (*Drive Yourself Sane*; 2011), Irving J. Lee (*Language Habits in Human Affairs*; 1994), Robert Pula (*A General Semantics Glossary*; 2000), Harry Weinberg (*Sensible Thinking for Turbulent Times*; 1997), etc. There are many books which have been published using general semantics to analyze and solve problems in areas such as education, communication, negotiation, management, social science, journalism, and personal adjustment. It is a highly pragmatic discipline for analyzing situations and solving problems.

Y A R D S T I C K S o f G S U S E D f o r INTERPRETING the NOVEL

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian origin, residing in Canada. He was born in Bombay in 1952 in Parsi family and graduated from St. Xavier's college. In 1975, he immigrates to Canada but

his writings come back to the homeland of memories and get stuck in a place where he grew up. He wrote three novels namely: *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1996) and *Family Matters* (2002). *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) is the short story collection and *The Scream* (2006) is his novella. His novels precise the historical reality and forms the backdrop of the narratives.

Such a Long Journey creates a vivid picture of Indian family life in general and that of a close weave Parsi family in particular and tells the story rich in subject matter and characterization set in the years around early seventies Mumbai. The novel mainly deals with its protagonist, Gustad Noble's modest dreams and aspirations. The novelist has united various narratives with the central narrative of Gustad who co-inhabits in a small flat in Khodadad Building with other members of his community. Gustad is optimistic about his son Sohrab, who have just cleared the entrance for IIT, Mumbai. Without consulting his son's views whether he wants to enter in IIT or not, he started dreaming about him as a scholar of the institute:

... he soon be studying at the Indian Institute of Technology. 'Sohrab will make a name for himself, you see if he doesn't', Gustad had said with a father's just pride. 'At last our sacrifices will prove worthwhile.'(03)

GUSTAD'S TIME-BINDING CAPACITY

Korzybski argues that all our ideas of man are ideological and zoological. He too states that we do error after error because we don't know how to negotiate with our past. There are three categories of such people who see their past but relate to it differently: Drifting fools (least bother about their past), Static fools (ideal picture of past) and Dynamic fools (hate their past). Here in the novel, Gustad is fit in as **Static fool** who sees the ideal picture of his past and don't risk for change. Every time he sees his

grandfather and father as the wealthy man of the city. He feels proud to see the furniture which he manage to rescued from the bankruptcy and each time told the story of his father and grandpa to the children.

... about Darius's great-grandfather who was a huge, powerful man, kind and gentle, but with an unswerving sense of justice and fair play, who had once lifted his own foreman by the collar till his feet swung clear off the ground, threatening to toss him out in the street, because the foreman had mistreated the one of the carpenters. (293-4)

SEMANTIC BLOCKS which SEIZES GUSTAD'S CREITICAL THINKING GUSTAD'S CONFLICT with HIS SON & RIGID EVALUATION

Gustad's rigid evaluation of the thing makes him suffer. Slavishly following customs hinders us from availing beneficial paths. A hallmark of maturity is to know when to be consistence and when to be flexible. Gustad does not know how to consistence with the idea of his own son. Sohrab as an emerging youth wants to get degree in BA but Gustad sees it as useless. The thing becomes worse for the rest of the family members when they both argued on the day of Roshan's birthday and spoil the party.

It's not suddenly. I'm sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT, all the time. I'm not interested in it, I'm not a jolly good fellow about it, and I'm not going there... IIT doesn't interest me. It was never my idea, you made all the plans. I told you I am going change to the arts programme, I like my college, and all my friends here. (48)

To overcome with this situation, Gustad may use 'Dating' tool of GS which helps him to stay attuned that we live in a changing world; and everything changes with time. So he has to evaluate the situation from time to time. It's true that during that period getting admission in IIT is a symbol of pride and prestige but it does not mean that doing BA is worse and useless.

GUSTAD'S CONFLICT with HIS SON & ALLNESS ATTITUDE

Gustad is also suffering from allness attitude which is not a healthy practice for leading a happy life. He thinks that he knows everything and generalizes about everything. From Sohrab's early childhood he has a firm belief that 'there seemed to be nothing Sohrab could not do, and do well' (64) and so he generalizes Sohrab's idea of taking arts as a subject worthless:

Forget your friends, forget your college and its useless degree. Think of your future. Everybody peon or two-paisa clerk is a BA these days. (69)

Even after when Sohrab left home, he continue to prove that his suggestions are better than his son through giving the example of pavement artist, "Tell that worthless son of your who kicked IIT in the face. Tell him when he come next time to visit you – that poor wandering pavement artist has two BAs". (182)

To solve this situation/problem, he may use the 'indexing' device of GS. Indexing helps him to find differences between the things. He could also use the phrases like 'to me', 'I think', 'it seems', etc. And can also use 'etc' in his statements. So that, it not becomes the general truth that a BA degree holder cannot find a balancing job.

GUSTAD'S CONFLICT with HIS SON & PROJECTION PROBLEM

Gustad have projection problem too. In this kind of block, when individuals say something about something, actually they are not describing the reality, but themselves or projecting their ideas of reality. When Gustad argues with his son about his education and found that because of his 'friends' Sohrab do not want to go in IIT, he projecting his ideas on Sohrab by saying,

Don't talk to me of friends! If you have good reasons, I will listen. But don't say friends! You must be blind if you can't see my own example and learn from it... 'That's friendship. Worthless and meaningless!' (49)

Not only at this situation but at many points, reader finds that Gustad tries to project the things on people. To overcome with this block, GS recommends the usages of the qualifying expression like 'it seem to me', 'as I see it', 'from my point of view', etc. if Gustad use these expressions than he would create the awareness that he is expressing personal observations and not the divine truths. So others are prepared to take them so and in his life the things would not become worse especially between his son and him.

GUSTAD'S CONCEPT of 'FRIEND' & RELYING on COMMON SENSE

Gustad always rely on his common sense. He never tried to test and revise his assumptions. When he decided to help his friend Jimmy Bilimoria, Dilnavaz, his wife warns him, 'And Jimmy doesn't even tell the details. How do you know you are doing the right thing?' But Gustad tells her, 'the details did not matter, it was the principle, of helping a friend'. (67) Even when he found the parcel with ten lakh rupees, he doesn't doubt to his friend and takes proud 'how noble work his friend is doing!' However, at that moment his wife tries to make him realize that if he do what his friend (Bilimoria) asked him to do, he lose his job. His wife also believes, 'sometime he was like a little child, refusing to acknowledge reality'. (120) He understands the situation when he found dead animals on his flowers and next day a note which is figuratively written about his friend, 'Bilimoria chaaval chorya/ Daando lai nay marva dorya'. (140) After that continuous torture he realizes that they are 'dealing with heartless people – poisonous snakes' (142) and thus he sees this world as duplicity and fragile:

I don't understand this world any more, First, your son destroyed our hopes. Now this rascal. Like a brother I looked upon him. What a world of wickedness it has become. (142)

To solve this type of situation Gustad might employ 'uncommon sense' while dealing with his friends letter. It also helps Gustad to bring his assumptions into awareness and lead him to examine and revise them and work accordingly.

GUSTAD'S FRIEND – a BLIND FOLLOWER

For better evaluation GS suggests to approach everything with question 'why'. Context makes things relevant. Jimmy Bilimoria, an ex-army man, brilliant and powerful, trapped by the treachery of government because he do not question and do whatever the authority asked for. The government where he was working is not doing any service but they satisfy their own personal objectives. Jimmy knows this very well but then too trapped by the Prime Minister who takes his confession for withdrawing money from the bank. Without 'questioning' and 'observing' the situation he wrote the confession:

Like a fool I agreed. trusted her. Then she said, maybe we should make our plan watertight. you can write a few lines just now. A confession. That you imitated my voice..... because you wanted to continue helping Mukti Bahini..... I wrote my confession.... like an idiot. (277)

Even Gustad couldn't understand that a person who is sharp and intelligent makes such mistakes. He too thinks that 'the worldly-wise Jimmy Bilimoria, a cynical Major he had known for so many years, whose motto in life was: when in doubt, keep doubting. Could he really have done the foolish things he is describing?' (277-8)

Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry's writings are tremendous operations of Indian history which is linked to interrupt everyday life. His characters' personal affairs with communal concerns situate them the significant of social beings. His novel, *Such a Long Journey*, is literally 'a long journey' for Gustad Noble, the protagonist, sometime because of his fate and sometime because of his own evaluation process and semantic blocks which stop him to take right decision in particular situation. With the help of GS' extensional devices it is an attempt to find out the semantic blocks of the protagonist and recommend GS tools for open up another perspective of the situations/problems. It is appropriate to conclude this paper with the words of John Milton: "The mind in its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven". (233-4)

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