

Such a Long Journey Study Guide

Such a Long Journey by Rohinton Mistry

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Plot Summary

Such a Long Journey examines the life of a handful of Parsi Indians in the turbulent early 1970's. When Britain withdraws from the subcontinent in 1948, two states are created. Muslims form one state, Pakistan. Pakistan's two parts are widely separated by its massive southern neighbor, India. In India, Hindus predominate, although society is officially secular. Parsis are a tiny, secretive religious minority.

The inhabitants of Khodadad Building north of Bombay are all Parsis. The most pious of them is Gustad Noble, the novel's protagonist. He works in a Parsi dominated bank downtown. Gustad intends that his eldest son, Sohrab, who excelled in secondary and college studies, attend the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and find a career more lucrative and prestigious than his own. Gustad bears many grudges from the past, which have limited his possibilities.

Sohrab, an artist at heart, rejects the plan. The hardheaded father and son clash and turn their backs on each other. Gustad's middle child, a son named Darius, causes only minor problems. Gustad's 9-year-old daughter, Roshan, is chronically ill, though. The illness brings Gustad into contact with a politically active doctor. Gustad's superstitious wife, Dilnavaz, falls under the sway of an upstairs neighbor who practices both black and white magic.

A Parsi mystic advises Gustad's sworn enemy. Another eccentric old Parsi rages out his window at the unfairness of the Almighty. A tragic and mentally deficient young man wanders about, delivering messages and playing. His mind was destroyed after falling from the neem tree at the center of the compound.

Although Gustad's war hero best friend, Major Jimmy "Bili Boy" Bilimoria, has vanished from the apartment complex, he writes to Gustad to ask a favor. Gustad follows his friend's instructions and receives a very large amount of cash. Gustad is forced into depositing it gradually into a false bank account. Then he is compelled to withdraw it even more rapidly. It is clear Gustad is dealing with terrorists. Gustad is forced to involve another friend, the cancer-riddled, lecherous Dinshawji. Dinshawji's hospitalization, death, and funeral force Gustad to contemplate anew the mysteries of life.

Jimmy Bilimoria reveals the sordid political story behind the money laundering, during a heartbreaking visit Gustad makes to his friend's prison hospital bedside. The shadowy lieutenant who serves as intermediary between Jimmy and Gustad makes clear Major Bilimoria's natural death in prison was a murder.

The novel's climax comes when the denizens of an especially depressed neighborhood, march to the municipal buildings to demand essential services. On the way, they pause at the wall outside Gustad's business, which a street artist has covered with depictions of the gods and holy people of all the religions of India. The municipality has decreed it will be demolished to widen the road. In a violent street fight, Tehmul, the tragic cripple

into whom Dilnavaz drew her son's evil demons, dies while trying to catch a brick. Gustad's lifetime of frustrations and anger melts as he prays over the victim's body. Sohrab and Gustad embrace. Although the sacred wall is demolished, so too is the limiting, bleak past.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

At 6 AM, Gustad Noble begins his prayers in the courtyard of the Khodadad Building apartment complex. Down the street, an unsanitary little man sells milk to a line of housewives.

Nearing 60, Gustad is tall and broad shouldered, the envy of sicklier relatives and friends. A slight limp betrays an accident Gustad suffered several years earlier, while pushing one of his sons to safety.

Miss Kutpitia's voice rings out, condemning the milk-seller for watering down his product, but to no effect. Among the milkman's customers is Dilnavaz Noble, Gustad's wife. Dilnavaz is anxious to complete her purchase and get on with her daily chores. She remembers the days before milk rationing and rising prices.

The children fear Miss Kutpitia as a witch, but Dilnavaz tolerates the old woman's idiosyncrasies, which are reputed to include black and white magic, as well as divination. Dilnavaz may be the reclusive Miss Kutpitia's only friend.

Gustad enjoys praying at sunrise, particularly the final ritual of snapping his *kusti* sharply when he removes it, to expel Ahriman, the evil one. As a child, Gustad imagined stalking the jungle armed with *kusti* alone, and pictured himself as a Parsi version of St. George the Dragon Slayer, whose biography Gustad had found in his father's bookstore. Neither neighborhood banter nor morning radio distracts Gustad from his rituals.

Gustad has already fetched the mail and "The Times of India" and has read the headlines about Pakistani atrocities. He reads at a desk his grandfather built, and remembers how the family business, Noble & Sons, lost nearly everything to bankruptcy. Gustad's boyhood friend, Malcolm Saldanha, had helped him rescue a few pieces of furniture. Gustad remembers another old friend, Major Bilimoria, but with no fondness. Bilimoria disappeared previously but has now written to ask a big favor.

Finding eldest son Sohrab listed in "The Times of India" among applicants accepted to the India Institute of Technology (IIT), Gustad awakens Dilnavaz. As she sets up equipment to fill the household water drums before the municipality shuts off water at 5 AM, Dilnavaz remembers when their son Darius had kept tropical fish and later birds. Sohrab had collected butterflies, a hobby Dilnavaz had found cruel. Gustad wants to awaken Sohrab, but Dilnavaz stops him. Gustad looks at the sleeping 19-year-old with joyful pride, hoping Sohrab's life will not be upset like his became after the ruination of his father's bookstore and his mother's death. Gustad had grown angry and helpless, cursing each new dawn.



The crowded apartment is dark because Gustad never took down the blackout paper mandated during the disastrous war with China in 1962, the same miserable year Gustad spent 12 weeks in bed as his broken hip healed. Gustad remembers the lies of Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En-lai, the Indian government's ringing jingoism, and the common people's eagerness to sell possessions to support the war effort. Beloved Nehru afterwards had resigned himself to political intrigues, and had worked to make his daughter Indira prime minister after him. Gustad also remembers that in 1965, when Pakistanis attacked India to gain a piece of Kashmir, the wisdom of his decision not to tear down the paper had been justified. It still hangs.

Today's paper reports a Republic of Bangladesh had been proclaimed. Dilnavaz is skeptical that a government will form. Bengali refugees are fleeing terror and bestiality. Dilnavaz wonders what Major Bilimoria would think of events. Gustad wishes not to reveal the letter from their ex-friend, who lived in their building and had been held up as an example to their children. "Uncle Major" had been a legendary war hero in 1948, the scourge of the British Army in the last days of Empire. After Uncle Major had saved Kashmir, he had gone on to many thrilling battles. Then, last year, Bilimoria had vanished without a word, wounding Gustad, who had loved him as a brother. Dilnavaz believes Bilimoria must have had a good reason for disappearing.

Gustad drinks his tea in silence and goes out to his prayers, but is annoyed when a diesel truck breaks his concentration. When he finishes his devotions, Gustad performs his daily bit of gardening, clearing scraps of paper from his vinca and mint bushes and his rose plant. Miss Kutpitia puts the vinca leaves and magical seeds to regular use in her potions.

Gustad finds a municipal notice of intent to widen the road. That will move the black stonewall even closer, making the compound seem like a prison camp or chicken coop. People shamelessly use the outside of the wall as a public latrine every night, producing a horrible stench and breeding swarms of flies and mosquitoes. Gustad dismisses the notice as just another proposal. A diesel smell persists, which reminds him of his accident and shattered hip.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the novel's protagonist, the pious Parsi Gustad Noble, his wife Dilnavaz, their three children, and provides a hint of their neighborhood. Gustad clearly has issues with the government, both national and municipal, since it is a system that ruined his grandfather and father. His hip still twinges occasionally from an accident nine years ago, which is often on his mind. Overall, however, he seems a contented, pleasant type. Discussion of the declaration of Bangladeshi independence allows the novel's beginning to be dated March 27, 1971.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Gustad returns from Crawford Market with a live chicken. His wife is frosty and determined not to cooperate in fattening it to achieve greater flavor. Fresh chickens remind Gustad of his grandmother and a childhood filled with music and celebration. He has braved the hated marketplace to make special the celebration of Roshan's birthday and Sohrab's admittance to IIT. Gustad plans to invite his work friend Dinshawji and perhaps others. The extra expense will be worth it.

Although Gustad's father had loved bartering with shopkeepers, Gustad himself finds Crawford Market an intimidating den of thieves. He worries about riding the bus home with dripping basket of meat amidst glaring vegetarian passengers. Everything about the market is menacing filthy, menacing, and gory. Gustad has no idea how to select a good chicken, but remembers everything about beef. In the old days, friend Malcolm, a musical Goan Catholic, mixed lessons about beef with the history of Christianity in India. It was intriguing, but Gustad did not believe in people changing their religions. Gustad and Malcolm eventually had lost touch. When Hindus launched a nationwide protest over slaughtering cattle, Gustad stopped going to the public market and made do with the inferior meat delivered door to door.

Gustad rashly promises to take care of the chicken, and watches with pride as Sohrab calms the bird. Gustad jokes about how this shows his son will excel at IIT. Sohrab sharply responds that he is going crazy from all the talk about IIT. Dilnavaz rebukes Sohrab for raising his voice to Daddy. She does realize they have been concentrating a lot on this first step towards Sohrab ultimately attending engineering college in America. She understands Sohrab's feelings, but also knows that Gustad, at 19, had to pay his own college fees and support his parents.

Roshan wants to keep the chicken forever, but the butcher arrives Saturday morning. The victim escapes and leads a chase around the compound. Gustad limps badly, trying to run. To everyone's surprise, lame Tehmul, who spends his days in the compound, catches it. Tehmul's hip fracture, treated by conventional methods, had been suffered in a fall from the compound's solitary neem tree.

Residents of Khodadad Building use the tree's leaves for medicinal purposes. Even passers-by pluck its twigs to use as toothbrushes.

Tehmul was never the same since his fall. The school expelled him. Tehmul's brother, a traveling salesman, looks after him. At age 30, Tehmul still prefers the company of children to adults, because children generally treat him well. Things that move through the air enchant Tehmul, but rarely can he catch anything. Tehmul speaks at a breakneck, nearly incomprehensible pace. He is constantly scratching and sometimes caressing himself in public. Grown-ups who call him "Scrambled Eggs," find him



annoying and shoo him away. Tehmul adores Gustad, who can decipher his speech and tolerate his presence. Tehmul had collected rats in Khodadad Building to claim the municipality's 25-paise bounty. When residents discovered Tehmul sometimes tortured live rats, his supply had been cut off. Tehmul does not enjoy his reputation. When he captures the chicken, it reminds residents of Tehmul's past.

As the butcher dispatches the chicken in the kitchen, Gustad asks the family who untied the celebratory victim. Roshan bursts into tears. The whole family looks accusingly at Gustad. Two crows watch through the window.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces the major character of dense, lame Tehmul-Lungraa, cruelly nicknamed "Scrambled Eggs." Both Tehmul and Gustad have suffered hip fractures, but Tehmul has been permanently brain damaged in his accident. He has attached himself to Only Gustad, among the adults in Khodadad Building, understands and tolerates Tehmul. An escaped bird is used to introduce Tehmul and develop the character of Malcolm Saldanha.

Gustad's trip through Crawford Market provides insights into his childhood past. His self-consciousness about carrying meat on the bus suggests conflict between Parsis and vegetarian Hindus. Religious conflict will become a major theme. We learn that Gustad was early introduced to the legendary history of Indian Christianity and attended Mass with friend Malcolm, a descendant of the Portuguese explorers in Goa. We also hear about Gustad's colleague at the bank, Dinshawji, whom Gustad intends to invite to the celebration.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

At the last minute, Miss Kutpitia bows out, having perceived an evil omen in a lizard's wriggling tail. Dilnavaz grumbles when the doorbell rings, announcing Dinshawji. Although Dinshawji recently returned to work after an illness, he still looks sickly. He began at the bank six years before Gustad. They have known each other for 24 years. Gustad has beer to offer and some Hercules XXX rum, Bilimoria's final gift before disappearing. The bottle reminds Gustad of the hidden letter from Bilimoria.

Dinshawji's wife, Alamai, to whom he refers to as the "Domestic Vulture," is not with him. Dinshawji suffers from periodic halitosis, worsened by stress. Today it is in abatement. Gustad had convinced him to consult the miraculous Madhiwalla Bonesetter, who had prescribed chewing a certain resin. This helped until Dinshawji sprained a jaw muscle and abandoned the practice. Friends and colleagues have learned to put up with the fearful stench.

Dinshawji last visited while Gustad was recovering from his accident. Dinshawji delivered news about bank events every Sunday. Dinshawji and Gustad toast the good old days, before Indira Gandhi nationalized the banks and began catering to the racist Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena goons have recently demonstrated outside the bank, but were broken up by police. Dinshawji, perspiring heavily, asks about the blackout paper, but is spared an explanation by the arrival of Gustad's children.

Sohrab is upset when Dinshawji congratulates him about IIT. Gustad denounces his son's "idiotic-lunatic talk." Dinshawji turns the conversation to physical fitness. Darius keeps up the workout tradition begun by Gustad's powerful but timid furniture-making grandfather. Darius' grandfather had regaled him as a boy with stories of legendary wrestlers. Gustad's grandmother had also been a knowledgeable fan. Bodybuilding has been Darius' only successful hobby, since he recovered from pneumonia. Miss Kutpitia said the disquieted spirits of Darius' dead pets caused the pneumonia. Even Dilnavaz is pleased when Gustad sing his "Donkey Serenade" to Roshan, but still looks disapprovingly at Dinshawji from the kitchen.

At dinner, Darius and Dinshawji are in rapport, but Sohrab is moody. Roshan turns green when the chicken is served. Her father hastens to sing "Happy Birthday." Dinshawji tickles Roshan. The group sounds cheers to a long life for Roshan.

The lights go off. Gustad sees the whole neighborhood is dark. Tehmul is wandering. Dinshawji continues entertaining the family by lamplight. Dilnavaz frets over the food getting cold. A toast to Sohrab's success at IIT leads to an explosive argument between Sohrab and Gustad. Father and son both refuse to back down, leaving Dinshawji uncomfortably unable to joke the company out of its mood.



Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 introduces Dinshawji, Gustad's malodorous workmate and friend, a good-natured man in obvious ill health. Dilnavaz does not receive him warmly.

During dinner, Gustad and Sohrab clash openly over IIT. Sohrab wants to remain in his college arts program where he has friends he does not want to leave. Gustad is determined his able son must not allow such foolishness to hold him back in life. Uncle Major's name comes up again as example of why friendship should not be overrated.

Gustad and Dinshawji briefly discuss Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist political party whose followers have recently demonstrated outside the bank against non-vegetarians like the Parsis. Tensions are high. We hear about Miss Kutpitia's sorcery, which will play a major role later in the novel.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Dinshawji leaves the party. The family argues over who spoiled the dinner. Gustad is determined to teach Sohrab obedience. The boy is not afraid. Dilnavaz throws herself between father and son as Gustad swings his belt, repeatedly striking his wife on the leg. Miss Kutpitia's voice sounds, demanding silence after bedtime. Gustad rants at Dilnavaz's witch friend. Dilnavaz hustles the children off to bed. Gustad's anger recedes, but he declares that until his son apologizes, Sohrab, whose life he once saved by throwing himself in front of a car, is dead to him.

Gustad cannot sleep. He mixes the remnants of all the bottles, and drinks the concoction at his grandfather's black desk, which Gustad had salvaged from his father's bookstore. He and Sohrab had always planned on building bookshelves for the few titles Gustad has retained, but now the boy is nothing to Gustad.

Gustad rereads Bilimoria's letter. Jimmy apologizes for having left without warning, but can explain little, for security reasons. He needs Gustad to accept a parcel on his behalf. Gustad recalls his friend's generosity to his children and role as hero to ungrateful Sohrab. Without an education, Sohrab will stand no chance in a world of Shiv Sena fanaticism.

The alcohol mellows Gustad. He reflects on the rainy morning nine years ago when he took time off from work to take Sohrab to his first day at St. Xavier's High, a hard school to get into. Gustad had misread the bus number and got into a confrontation with the conductor when he discovered his mistake. Sohrab had lost his balance stepping off the moving bus. Gustad had then thrown himself in front of an approaching taxi. Between fits of fainting, Gustad had told the taxi driver his address. The taxi driver drove him there free of charge. Bilimoria had been at the apartment complex and recommended Madhiwalla Bonesetter, rather than a conventional hospital. There would be no operation, no pins, no cast, and no bill. Jimmy had carried Gustad into the clinic and watched as Bonesetter immobilized the leg with sandbags.

Gustad now realizes how helpless he would have been without Jimmy, and begins writing a reply, using an old-fashioned nib pen, to show respect for the recipient.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 explains how Gustad received his hip injury and the help he had received from Jimmy Bilimoria. Gustad's anger at Sohrab's ingratitude flares after dinner, ending in a belt assault on his son that Dilnavaz steps in to endure instead. Alcohol mellows Gustad and he muses about his injury and lost friendship. We learn a bit more about the volatile politico-religious atmosphere in which the Nobles live.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Dilnavaz awakes concerned about the terrible words father and son exchanged. She fills the kitchen water tank and goes out for milk. Miss Kutpitia summons her to her apartment. Miss Kupitia is also worried about Sohrab. He resembles her late nephew Farad, whom she raised. At 15, Farad perished in a bus accident, 35 years ago. Since then, Miss Kutpitia has locked up her heart, and her apartment. Dilnavaz knows none of the hidden details. Miss Kutpitia asks who might profit from Sohrab's failure, then offers a magical recipe for fighting the black magic. It begins with a lime. Dilnavaz does not notice the letters on Gustad's desk as she returns to bed.

Sohrab has always excelled in school. His parents encourage everything that interests him. Gustad is always looking for hobbies that could lead to a professional career for his son. Sohrab's only failure has been collecting insects. Because he improvised tools, the specimens disintegrated nauseatingly. Sohrab's greatest triumph has been producing, directing, abridging, and starring in *King Lear*. Only in college does he realize his father will not countenance a life in the arts. For Gustad, IIT is the Promised Land

Also troubled and confused by the previous evening, Sohrab awakes and read Gustad's letters and asks his mother about them. When Gustad arises, late and hung over, Dilnavaz accuses him of hiding mail. Dilnavaz is worried by Bilimoria's vagueness and possible danger. Sohrab tries to intervene, recalling old political discussions, but Gustad returns to IIT and the danger of believing what newspapers report. As flames appear to be rekindling, Dilnavaz silences her son, but Gustad will not relent. Dilnavaz leads her son to the kitchen to begin Miss Kuptitia's lime cure, which he declares unscientific nonsense.

On Monday, Gustad sheepishly visits Dinshawji's desk at lunchtime. Every day they go to the canteen together to share lame jokes about India's ethnic groups, including their own. This breaks up the drab working day. Dinshawji is normally the star, but sometimes, Gustad leads clever sing-alongs. Sometimes, they hold serious discussions about topics such as the current controversy over the Tower of Silence, which reformers demand be replaced by cremation. Dinshawji turns it into a joke about having his remains scattered all over Bombay. The two decide to walk to Flora Fountain, the hub of traffic in and out of town. Passing the tidy desk of beautiful typist Laurie Coutino's, Dinshawji makes his usual lewd comments. He is sweating heavily as he complains about the Shiv Sena leader who worships Hitler and Mussolini. They encounter an artist drawing gods and goddesses on the pavement in exchange for devotees' coins. Dinshawji becomes enraged and says that when they take over, the Marathas will change street names, rubbing out the life the Parsis have known. Gustad realizes his friend is not just a joker.



A man riding a Lambretta falls victim to a hit-and-run car and lands bleeding on the pavement near them. Dinshawji wants to help, but Gustad is overcome by nausea. Police take charge and make it clear the victim will survive. Dinshawji leads Gustad to a restaurant to recover. Dinshawji muses about what fun it would be to take Laurie to the private upper level. He orders food, but Gustad is disgusted by the establishment's filthiness, and in no mood for humor.

Gustad recognizes the victim as the taxi driver who helped him years before, whom he never managed to thank. Gustad had thought about this man the other night and marvels at the coincidence. Today Gustad had his turn to help, but he has failed.

Dinshawji asks about news on Bilimoria, and muses about his rejoining the army to fight the butchery documented in the papers. Russia and America are doing nothing to save the poor Bengalis. Gustad gives his views on geopolitical reality saying that Russia is friendly with Afghanistan, but needs Pakistan to gain access to the Indian Ocean. Dinshawji jokes that then they will be able to grab the U.S. fleet by the testicles. They hurry back to work, Dinshawji again proclaiming the agony Laurie is causing him.

The black wall's stench and the swarm of insects assail Gustad when he arrives home. His wife is ranting about *his* sons. Mr. Rabadi, a neighbor with whom Gustad has long been feuding, is now charging that Darius is after his daughter. Until old Tiger died of overexertion, Rabadi refused to restrain his large dog from relieving himself in Gustad's bushes. When Tiger died, his owner consulted Dustoorji Baria, a retired priest who advised Rabadi to replace Tiger with a small, white, female dog. This led Rabadi to buy Dimple, who takes no interest in Gustad's bushes. At dinner, Gustad demands to know what happened between Darius and Jasmine. Darius is indignant, but Gustad orders him to stay away from the crackpot's daughter. Flies and mosquitoes torment the Nobles during dinner. They rub on repellent to get through the night.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 reintroduces the taxi driver who, nine years earlier, injured then rescued Gustad. Gustad is unable to help the poor man, still unnamed. Ghulam Mohammed will soon play a major role in the novel. Dinshawji's life is complicated by lust for a beautiful typist in the bank, later to become a major issue for them and Gustad, but shows himself not only a joker but a profound thinker. Another neighbor is introduced, Mr. Rabadi, whose long-standing feud with Gustad is intensified by Darius' behavior towards his daughter Jasmine. Khodadad Building is not a happy community. We receive additional insight into Parsi religious practices and the opposition they face from the Hindu majority. As we will learn in detail later, the Parsis consign their dead to the Tower of Silence, where vultures consume the flesh off corpses' bones. A retired Parsi priest is shown offering advice and incantations on such matters as the purchase of replacement pets.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Two weeks later, Roshan asks to enter a school raffle for a beautiful doll. Proceeds will go towards support of the refugees from West Pakistan. The daily mail brings no reply from Bilimoria, but includes a response from the education trust fund that Gustad groveled before on behalf of his ungrateful son. Dilnavaz's nightly lime ritual has accomplished nothing beyond ending the father-and-son shouting matches. Gustad is perpetually enraged by the combination of his son's betrayal, Bilimoria's silence, and the mosquitoes and stench emanating from the wall. He and Bilimoria had watched the wall being built to isolate their building from the heavy traffic introduced when tall office buildings were constructed around it. The friends had prayed together behind it, sheltered from non-Parsi eyes. Now people urinate on it every night.

The children's schools organize newspapers collection drives to aid the refugees. Gustad sells old copies to afford ongoing subscription, but agrees to provide a few. Darius decides to turn to the neighbors for donations, but is forbidden to approach Kutpitia and Rabadi.

A week later, the Nobles' mail includes merely an announcement that Roshan won the lottery. The family must pick up the large prize at school. Roshan is sent to Miss Kutpitia to ask if Gustad may use her telephone to arrange a Saturday pick-up. She is the only tenant who can afford a phone. Miss Kutpitia allows others to use it for a price. The phone sits, locked, two steps inside her doorway. No one intrudes deeper into her apartment, which is rumored to contain embalmed relatives or perhaps just the bones left after the vultures got done. Roshan is afraid, but wants her dolly.

Heading to the phone, father and daughter encounter Tehmul in the compound. In perpetual agitation, he holds a sheaf of papers he wants Gustad to examine, probably just more Shiv Sena propaganda. Police Inspector Bamji arrives home and frightens Tehmul away.

Miss Kutpitia gives Roshan a large pile of newspapers for her school and asks to see the dolly when it arrives. Tehmul has disappeared, but old Cavasji is standing in his second-floor window, as usual lamenting his fate to the heavens.

The next day, Tehmul approaches Gustad again, and begs to touch the beautiful bridal doll Gustad carries. Gustad forbids this, but then gives in to Tehmul's piteous begging and allows one touch. Tehmul breaks into tears and hobbles away. Dilnavaz frets over the doll's expensive white clothing getting dirty and makes Roshan remove it for storage until a proper showcase can be built. Tehmul rings the bell and begs to touch the doll again. Gustad allows one more touch, then studies the documents Tehmul bears. They are the landlord's petition to the municipality to drop plans to widen the road. Tehmul is



collecting residents' signatures. Tehmul cannot keep his attention on the petition until the doll is packed away.

Gustad finally receives a letter from Bilimoria. The major is working for the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in the northwest frontier area, where Pakistani butchers are running amuck. He asks Gustad to go to the Chor Bazaar, find a bookstall displaying the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, and search for a particular passage underlined in red. The vendor will hand him a parcel containing instructions. Gustad will recognize the vendor, and must trust Bilimoria for now. One day Gustad and Bilimoria will be reunited.

Dilnavaz is impatient to learn what Bilimoria has written, and is concerned by Chor Bazaar, 007-like RAW, and the Shakespeare business. Sohrab observes that the prime minister uses RAW like a private police force to do her dirty work. Gustad's temper flares and he argues politics with Sohrab. Gustad threatens to close the "genius's" mouth. Sohrab stalks off. Gustad thrusts the IIT financial papers at Sohrab, but the "shameless dog" throws them in the trash. Dilnavaz retrieves them and realizes the lime treatments are not working.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 shows how war relief is burdening the Indian population. The schools are collecting scrap newspaper. Roshan's school sponsors an auction. Roshan wins a beautiful imported doll, which attracts Tehmul's demented attention. We see the poverty of the Khodadad Building. Only one resident owns a telephone, and charges neighbors to use it, despite her affluence. Tehmul is distributing a petition to protest the municipality's plans to widen the road, and is collecting tenants' signatures. We glimpse another resident, a crazy old man who screams protests at the Almighty for His mismanagement of the world. The old man superstitiously depends on wearing herbs to control his high blood pressure. Gustad's receipt of a letter from Bilimoria, which gives cryptic instructions about picking up a parcel, sets up the action to come.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

On Monday, claiming he needs to see a doctor about his hip, Gustad asks his boss, the kind hearted, finicky Mr. Madon, for half a day off on Friday. Gustad worries the white lie will anger the Almighty and imperil his family. Returning to his department, Gustad sees Dinshawji clowning around Laurie's desk. What could have come over him, Gustad wonders, particularly since Laurie's desk lies in full view of bank customers? Laurie struggles to keep her composure. Gustad warns his friend she might complain. Madon will not be amused. Dinshawji grows indignant, for he feels the Catholic girls are all hot-blooded, not like the repressed Parsi girls. Dinshawji jokes that Gustad is trying to move in on Laurie.

Crowded Chor Bazaar confuses Gustad as he strolls about, seeing worthless junk side by side with valuable objects. Seeing a Meccano set like one he owned as a child stirs memories of his father. Gustad bargains for it. He also remembers how Pappa put off surgery too long, entrusting his drunken younger brother with the bookstore just before being anesthetized. The younger brother frittered away the business' assets at the race course. With the Nobles' heavy medical bills, 17-year-old Gustad's college funds dried up. Pappa's tears begging forgiveness made Gustad resolve never to cry over anything or anyone. Young Gustad took satisfaction in the hated uncle's passing. Gustad resented his father's voluntary impoverishment.

Gustad finds a lane of bookstalls. One has a respectable collection of English titles. He buys three that catch his eye, dickering down the seller's price. At a second stall, he sees an ornate Shakespeare, and finds Jimmy's underlining of "Put money in thy purse."

A man in a white turban speaks. Gustad recognizes the clean-shaven face of the tall taxi driver. The turban is actually surgical gauze. They chat about their traffic accidents and Gustad's son. Ghulam says that Bilimoria talks about Gustad and his family often. Any friend of "Bili Boy" (Jimmy Bilimoria's army nickname) is friend of his. Ghulam has followed Bili Boy into RAW. The scooter incident was no accident, but an occupational hazard. Ghulam reveals nothing about his friend's activities, but hands Gustad a parcel and an address where he can be reached, the House of Cages, a brothel located near Gustad's family doctor. Peerbhoy Paanwalla will pass messages to Ghulam. Gustad has heard the pimp's colorful stories and has seen the ladies trying to lure customers inside.

Arriving home happy, Gustad learns from Tehmul that Roshan is sick and is sleeping.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 takes Gustad to the Chor Bazaar on Friday, its busiest day, after the Muslims complete their mosque prayers. A favorite childhood toy brings back memories of how



Gustad's father allowed his drunken brother to take control of the bookstore and reduce the family to penury. Bankruptcy forced 17-year-old Gustad to finance his own education, fueling his current rancor at Sohrab's ingratitude. The tearful repentance of Gustad's father made Gustad resolve never to weep. Gustad finally meets Ghulam Mohammed, a closed-mouthed and somewhat menacing man, who arranges a train of communication with Bilimoria. A brothel, the House of Cages, will be featured for the rest of the novel. We also learn that Dinshawji's behavior has grown blatant enough to concern Gustad.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Dilnavaz asks Miss Kutpitia why the lime spell is not working on Sohrab. The old lady orders a modification. Someone must drink the limes' juice. She suggests using Tehmul; who has so few brains he will not even notice. Dilnavaz obeys, follows the recipe, and hopes Tehmul will wander by before Gustad arrives. Roshan sees the glass when she comes home from school, complaining of diarrhea all day, but is forbidden to drink it. Instead, she is given some pills and is put to bed. As Tehmul hobbles by, Dilnavaz offers him a drink. The limejuice is very tasty. Tehmul wants more. Dilnavaz says that she will call him when more is ready, then dismisses Tehmul.

Dilnavaz is angry that Gustad has bought more books, and asks what is in Bilimoria's package. Gustad focuses on Roshan. He keeps a good supply of Sulpha-Guanidine pills on hand, because Darius earlier suffered the same malaise. The amusing family physician, Dr. Paymaster, has not kept up on current medical literature. Gustad cannot see paying for prescriptions, so the Nobles have stocked up on popular pills and syrups to treat all minor ailments.

Tehmul is waving outside, requesting the neighbors to circulate the petition. When Gustad delivers it, Tehmul is babbling about "verytastyjuice." Dilnavaz brushes this aside and waits to look inside Bilimoria's package. All three gape at the stacks of bundled new currency notes that tumble out. Gustad roars at Tehmul to leave, before realizing he must make the babbler keep the secret. He gives him two rupees, which Tehmul folds into his sock. For good measure, Gustad threatens to slit Tehmul's throat if he talks. Gustad is sorry about frightening the simpleton, but believes only fear will assure Tehmul's silence.

Dilnavaz restacks the bundles and is rewrapping the plastic. Gustad must send the money back to the taxi driver before he gets into trouble. When Gustad counts the bundles that hold one million rupees, Dilnavaz grows more nervous. Bilimoria's brief letter thanks Gustad for visiting the bazaar and asks him to use his position to get around regulations on large bank deposits and to put this government money into an account in the name of "Mira Obili." The money will fund guerrilla operations. Dilnavaz warns Gustad that he could lose his job and starve. Gustad insists that he has given his word. Dilnavaz urges him to say he has transferred departments and cannot make deposits. Sohrab laughs that Daddy robbed his bank, reads the note, and informs them that "Mira Obili" is a childish anagram for Bilimoria, and recommends they spend the money on municipal projects. Gustad slaps his son and demands he leave his house and his life. Gustad intends to hide the money until Ghulam returns in a week.

Darius and the mosquitoes return at dinnertime. Darius is carrying a pile of newspapers, which Jasmine gave him. Gustad is furious that Darius is still talking with her. A swarm of insects occupies Gustad's attention. He remembers an old remedy. Gustad sets a



shallow dish of water beneath a bare light bulb, and the mosquitoes dive after the reflection. The family eats in peace, with Sohrab refusing to leave his room. Two days later, Sohrab packs and leaves home, promising to visit his mother once a week when Gustad is at work. Gustad is surprised and hurt, but maintains, "What is it to me?"

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 marks a turning point in the story. It includes the final break between father and son. Sohrab can no longer endure being treated like a child. Gustad and Dilnavaz are at odds over the enormous sum of money Bilimoria has passed to Gustad for deposit.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Roshan's diarrhea, the hidden money, and Sohrab's departure trouble Gustad's daybreak prayers. He ignores the third concern. Inspector Bamji is leaving for work, so he and Gustad chat briefly about the municipal proposal and about passers-by urinating on the wall. Bamji asks what Tehmul might have been talking about regarding a mountain of money in the Nobles' apartment. Fortunately, no one takes Scrambled Eggs seriously, although Gustad worries that thieves might want a look. Tehmul is absent from the compound all evening. Gustad watches for Tehmul to warn him again.

Cavasji is railing against the monsoons that will soon ruin people's lives. His daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pastakia, requests fresh mint leaves to calm him. Gustad dislikes the inquisitive, short-tempered, demanding woman, but obliges. Gustad brings in some flower spikes to prepare one of Miss Kutpitia's brews to administer to Roshan. Gustad next prepares a note for delivery via Peerbhoy.

Weeks pass without word through Peerbhoy. The newspapers tell of refugee caps swelling to 7 million in the monsoon season. Gustad wishes he could have helped Bilimoria's guerrillas. Rain and thunder keep Gustad awake at night. He remembers his school years and how Bilimoria had carried him into Bonesetter's crowded, fragrant clinic. Bonesetter is revered for miraculous cures of people on whom Western doctors have given up. He uses his bare hands, herbs and bark, and his right foot. He tells no one his secrets.

Gustad had seen people injured in his grandfather's workshop, but sensed nothing like the agony he endured in Bonesetter's clinic. Gustad remembers his leg being moved in a peculiar way and the pain decreasing. A specially made paste had to be applied, and Dilnavaz had worked non-stop and very hard for three months to get her husband back on his feet, making and applying the paste according to Bonesetter's prescription.

Gustad falls asleep and dreams about finding a 10-rupee bundle, then being pelted by many more. He asks his tormenters why they are doing it, since he does not want their rubbish. Inspector Bamji appears, to defend him. Then Madon appears, to dismiss him. Dilnavaz shakes Gustad out of his dream. Gustad sleeps soundly the rest of the night.

Gustad cannot go outside for prayers in the drizzly morning. Crows are cawing wildly. Gustad finds a decapitated, crow-eaten bandicoot beneath his vinca. The Gurkha night watchman is fetched for an explanation. The Gurkha claims he made regular rounds throughout the night and saw and heard nothing.

Sunday dawns clear, but Gustad prays indoors. The cawing resumes. Gustad finds crows fighting over a decapitated cat, which reminds him of childhood fantasies about St. George. Tehmul appears for the first time since before Gustad went to the Chor



Bazaar. Gustad coaxes him close. Tehmul laughs at the cat. The Gurkha is reprimanded again. Inspector Bamji is shown the carcass. Bamji observes that the knife was skillfully wielded and suggests that Gustad must have an enemy, or perhaps that the secluded compound is just a good place for lunatics to dispose of their handiwork. Watching Tehmul chase a butterfly, Gustad sadly remembers Sohrab, but shrugs off Dilnavaz's suggestion she invite Sohrab to return home. The Rabadis walk by with Dimple, complaining about people using fundraising as an excuse for getting close to their daughter. The Nobles ignore them.

In the morning, the Gurkha is guarding the vinca bush, but Gustad inspects it and finds a note inserted in its branches. It contains two lines of Gjarati verse, "Stole the rice of Bilimoria, we'll take a stick and then we'll beat ya." Gustad understands the decapitations.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 fills out the story of Gustad's broken hip, describing Bonesetter's unorthodox methods, which confound Western practitioners. The monsoon season arrives, deepening the plight of East Pakistani refugees. Gustad wants to help Bilimoria's cause, but is afraid to make the bank deposits. The appearance of a skillfully decapitated rat and a cat, plus a cryptic note in Gustad's native tongue lends an ominous air to the story.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The note is a crushing, incomprehensible betrayal of years of friendship. Its tone is taunting, mocking, and deceiving. Gustad knows Bilimoria has trapped him and robbed him of choice. Dilnavaz is surprised Gustad has finished his prayers so quickly, and catches the trouble in his voice and on his face. Reading the note, she wants to turn everything over to Inspector Bamji. Gustad objects that the police have no power over RAW. Roshan and Darius could be the next victims of these heartless people. Gustad withdraws one bundle of bills for a first deposit. Ten thousand rupees a day will not be suspicious. It will take 100 days to deposit the whole. He will tell them that is the best he can do.

Air raid sirens sound every day at 10 AM, perhaps to familiarize people with the sound, people think; the government has never offered an explanation. Gustad is tense carrying the money. He passes the pavement artist, whose creations appeal to all faiths. This morning, someone has accidentally stepped on a holy visage, so the crowd demands reparations. Gustad is in a hurry to get to the bank, but realizes these holy drawings could be useful. He will speak with the artist one day. Gustad asks Dinshawji to meet him outside at lunchtime.

Gustad explains everything to Dinshawji, omitting only the rat, cat, and note, in order not to frighten his friend away. Together, they will help the liberation struggle. Gustad feels badly about jeopardizing Dinshawji's job and pension. Dinshawji loves intrigue and is eager to participate. He rails against CIA activities in East Pakistan. Dinshawji accepts the money and makes a suggestive pass by Laurie's desk on his way back to work. Gustad is worried. Dinshawji's eyes betray constant pain, and he puts great energy into abandoning his self-respect. Gustad winces when Dinshawji takes advantage of the girl's ignorance of Parsi slang to make a pun on her name. *Lorri* in Gjarati means "penis." Laurie smiles, but looks puzzled.

Every day Gustad hands Dinshawji a new packet, and receives a receipt. Gustad suggests that Dinshawji refrain from carrying on with Laurie while they are helping Bilimoria. Dinshawji maintains his usual behavior is the best cover-up, which makes sense. Gustad prays that nothing will go wrong with the deposits and wonders what more Bilimoria will demand once the money is in place.

The doorbell rings one morning in August, after Gustad has left for work and Tehmul has consumed his limejuice. A kindly nun delivers Roshan home, sick. Dilnavaz puts her to bed, then goes to Miss Kutpitia's apartment to phone the doctor. At the door, Dilnavaz hears conversation inside and a door slam. The old lady overhears the conversation and suggests Roshan's problem lies in the evil eye. Dilnavaz must thread a yellow lime and seven green chilies together and hang them over the door for protection. Sohrab's



cure will require patience, but can be sped up if Dilnavaz adds clippings from Tehmul's nails to the remedy. It will drive him mad.

Gustad arrives as Dimple is taking her walk. Dustoorji Baria has given Rabadi a prayer to safeguard Jasmine against the savage lust of boys like Darius. The prayer makes Rabadi feel invincible confronting Gustad about newspapers. Gustad is preoccupied with Roshan and passes by angrily. He fetches two thick stacks of papers and deposits them on Rabadi's doorstep.

While Gustad takes Roshan to the doctor, Dilnavaz makes the talisman and conceals it behind the blackout paper. She summons Tehmul for his limejuice and remarks on the length of his fingernails. She refuses to let him drink until she trims them. Although Tehmul's nails are filthy and disgusting, Dilnavaz does her work, loathing herself for what she is doing to the innocent man. She continues with his toenails. Dilnavaz follows Miss Kutpitia's detailed instructions for burning the clippings on a coal fire. The stench is horrifying. She adds spices to open Tehmul's "channels," and allow his spirit to yank the evil out of Sohrab's brain.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 is set against the worsening political and military situation in the Indian subcontinent. The U.S. and the Soviet Union are vying for control. Open war between India and Pakistan is eminent. The refugee crisis in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) is growing. Bilimoria and the RAW appear ominously outside police control. Gustad obeys Bilimoria's instructions. Gustad recruits the ailing Dinshawji to deposit the cash gradually, in order to skirt detection. Unfortunately, Dinshawji's lust has made his joking so blatantly sexual Gustad fears it will unravel the plot. We will ultimately see that Gustad is correct. At this point, though, he accepts that acting normally is their best protection. The two Parsi mystics, Dustoorji Baria and Miss Kutpitia, both contribute to the Nobles' home drama. Poor Tehmul appears destined for a terrible ending. His burning nails bring tears to Dilnavaz's eyes and trouble her conscience. However, she must save her eldest son, who now rarely visits the house.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Dr. Paymaster's dispensary is located in a miserable, crumbling neighborhood. The doctor caters to local workers who injure themselves on the job, people injured or who have taken ill in the movie theaters, the House of Cages' ladies who require periodic check-ups for licensing purposes, and families like the Nobles who have always looked to Paymaster for routine health care. The last group has been dwindling, but is Paymaster's favorite. He does not care for the prostitutes, who make him feel like a building inspector.

Gustad hates coming to the dispensary, but has no choice. He remembers the House of Cages from childhood visits to the doctor. The House of Cages is a full-service brothel catering to everyone's wallet. Peerbhoy still sits in a stall outside, looking like a swami or sage guru and, he proudly explains the benefits of the health products he sells. His premier offering is *palung-tode paan*, a powerful aphrodisiac known as the "bed-breaker." Peerbhoy tells stories from ancient days about rajas and emperors who benefited from the product. His most vivid story is about Shri Lokhundi Lund, "Mister Iron Cock," who wears out the brothel's employees to collect the money-back guarantee. The first contestant takes him on again and brings him to a shrieking, moaning climax. Peerbhoy had laughed 15-year-old Gustad and his schoolmates away when they had tried to get inside. Since then, illness and forbidden pleasures have entwined in Gustad's mind, causing him profound disgust. A sick child, of course, makes him overcome this and visit Dr. Paymaster.

Dr. Paymaster happily waves the Nobles in, glad to see them after so long an absence, but sorry Roshan is unwell. The doctor is exasperated to learn how long the diarrhea has been going on, and that Gustad has been medicating her independently. Paymaster determines Roshan needs an injection, and talks about her new doll to distract her. As he writes a follow-up prescription to treat an intestinal virus, the doctor talks about East and West Pakistan, India, and America in medical terms. The little green bottle is expensive. "Refugee tax," the pharmacist apologizes.

Heading home, Gustad blames himself for trying to treat Roshan. She tells her mother about the plans for the doctor to marry her dolly. Then the inevitable parental battle begins over blame. Like his forefathers, Gustad thinks it unnecessary to boil water, and neither he nor his two big sons ever help Dilnavaz with the heavy chores. The fight turns to Sohrab's disobedience, and how the Gustad has always spoiled the children. Roshan cries and refuses to be comforted until they exchange a real Mummy-Daddy kiss. Then she goes to bed.

Rabadi gathers the newspapers dropped outside his door, determined to get even with the Nobles. After complaining to Bamji, he piles them beside Gustad's bushes and sets them on fire. Bamji does nothing. Gustad hears shouts and sees only Tehmul and the



dying blaze. Maddened by the smoke, the mosquitoes swarm and will not be trapped. Odomos is the only relief that night.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 again brings out the ominous international situation, as Dr. Paymaster declaims on India, Pakistan, the refugees, guerrillas, and U.S. in diagnostic medical terms. We also learn the history and lore of the House of Cages, hearing ancient and modern tales of sexual exploits. The Nobles' conflicts, internal and external, deepen. The resident police inspector is shown to be ineffectual. Tehmul remains unaffected by his treatments.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Dr. Paymaster changes Roshan's prescriptions and orders costly tests, forcing Gustad to hock his camera. Roshan knows that her strong Daddy is scared and feels helpless, almost near tears. Gustad suggests they bring out her doll to keep her company in her bed.

Gustad collects the 39th bundle. He's now almost halfway done. As he nears the bank, Laurie asks to talk in private, at lunchtime, outside. Gustad is puzzled and flattered. Inside, Dinshawji is re-telling an old story about how a wife's driving improves her sleeping sexual performance. Gustad hands him the daily bundle and says he has a lunchtime mission to attend to. Gustad wanders by Laurie's desk at teatime, not sure why he does.

Gustad and Laurie, who asks him to use her first name, walk to the restaurant Gustad visited earlier with Dinshawji. The private rooms upstairs are empty. Gustad muses on what Dinshawji would say, so close to Laurie's undulating bottom as they climb. A sign inside the room instructs guests, "*Please Ring Bell For Waiter Under Table.*" Gustad laughs at the poor grammar, and is surprised at Laurie's ugly laugh. It is clear from the furnishings what the private rooms are for, and Gustad assures Laurie he has nothing like that in mind. After studying the menu, their hands accidentally touch, as both grope for the bell. A surprised waiter appears, takes their order, and assures the couple how long it will be before he returns. Unhappy men make poor tippers.

People have clued Laurie in to the pun. Now she is embarrassed come to work and even hates her name. Embarrassed before the innocent girl, furious at his foolish friend, and fearful of the boss, Gustad promises to make Dinshawji stop teasing Laurie. At first, Laurie thought Dinshawji was a cute old man. However, now he is also talking about secret service work, helping fund guerrillas. Gustad restrains his response and jokes the topic away. Laurie appears concerned that Dinshawji is ill and only two years from retirement, but cannot let the joking to go on. Gustad will convince him this evening, he says, thinking what he will do to the bloody fool.

Gustad regrets not being able to come home early as he promised Roshan, to help dress her doll. He has a sharp headache, and kneads his forehead and neck at his desk. All his troubles run through his mind. Opening his eyes, he sees Dinshawji standing before him, and slams his fist down hard on the desktop. Dinshawji wonders what he has done wrong. Gustad will explain outside, after work. Gustad accomplishes nothing all afternoon, thinking about Bilimoria as Cain and Abel, and Sohrab as Absalom (remembering Malcolm's Christian stories, long ago). Gustad begs Dad Ormuzd to show him what is left for him in life.



Dinshawji's breath is unbearably foul when he meets Gustad at 6 PM. Gustad keeps him in suspense as they walk to the restaurant. Finally, Gustad tells him about his talk with Laurie, concentrating on the secret service aspect. If that reaches Madon, they are finished. If Dinshawji stops his harassment immediately, Laurie will not go to the boss, so he must stop joking about everyone. Gustad will spread rumors that Dinshawji's health is declining. Thereafter, Dinshawji is grave and fragile, and is not playing a role. Gustad feels awful about confiscating his friend's mask.

Dilnavaz is nervous about a strange, barefoot fellow who arrived earlier and said he would return at 9 PM. Gustad tells his wife that he asked the man to visit in order to fix the stinking wall. The pavement artist is interested in the project because police have been harassing him. The artist is impressed with 300 feet of smooth black stone, which will attract many visitors daily. He begins a quick sketch, but is offended by the stench. In the shadows is the soft hiss of someone relieving himself. Gustad chases the offender away. Gustad says that no one will do that once the wall is adorned with holy images and promises the surfaces will be washed clean by morning.. The artist says that the iconography of Hinduism alone could cover the wall, but that he also draws upon the Sikh, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Jainist traditions. He has a B.A. in comparative world religions, as well as one in art. At dawn, Gustad slips the street sweeper five rupees to wash down the wall with a wire brush.

The first drawing is of Trimurti, the Hindu gods of creation, preservation, and destruction. Gustad would have preferred Zarathustra, but realizes most of the vile urinators are Hindus, so this is expedient. When Gustad comes home, a crucifixion and Jumma Masjid are joining the gallery. The artist intends to work all night and will shoo off any transgressors. Moses and Ganpati Baba are complete by dawn. Over the next few days, as the wall fills with gods and holy people, the mosquitoes disappear along with their lost breeding ground. The artist changes, too. His cycle of arrival, creation, and obliteration has been interrupted. He likes the neighborhood and the vast wall he has on which to work. Life has become confusing.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The heart of Chapter 12 is Laurie's complaint about Dinshawji's provocative behavior. She intends to resign rather than face colleagues who laugh about her first name meaning "penis." She will have to explain her leaving to the manager. This is bad enough -- poor girl and poor Dinshawji, who will lose his job and pension -- but it also threatens the deposit scheme, because foolish Dinshawji has been boasting about being a secret agent in service of the guerrilla movements. Laurie laughs it off, but the manager might not, and could launch an investigation. Gustad confronts Dinshawji and demands he set aside the mask of mirth that has been covering his declining health.

Life's difficulties are helping Gustad understand Mrs. Pastakia's tiresome blathering about migraines. Gustad calls out to the Parsi god for help. All the gods and holy ones worshipped in India come to his aid through the crayons of the sidewalk artist. Gustad has convinced him to cover the black wall with holy pictures. These, Gustad figures, will



end the use of the structure as a public urinal. It works. The mosquitoes disappear, too. One torment is removed from Gustad's life, but is transferred to the artist, who is now ill at ease with his non-transient situation. The artist has a degree in comparative religions, so the reader can expect lists of names, events, and places. Few of the details are crucial to the story, however. Those that are important are well developed. The rest can be glossed over.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

On the day of the 51st bundle, Roshan feels better. As Gustad hands Dinshawji the money, he notices a swelling in the quiet man's abdomen. Dinshawji drags himself about now, and disappoints everyone awaiting his humor. Gustad suspected cancer during Roshan's birthday party. Now he is ashamed to think about what will happen to the deposits if Dinshawji cannot work. Gustad's spirits rise when he sees the pavement artist working happily and pointing out a floral offering before his drawing of Saraswati. Passers-by have left enough monetary offerings the artist to afford new clothes and shoes. Dilnavaz is hushing the children playing in the compound. Gustad hurries to learn why. Roshan's diarrhea has returned. The bridal doll's dress looks funereal, sending a shiver down Gustad's spine. He will go to the doctor alone to demand reference to a specialist. He and Dilnavaz again fight over boiling water.

In Gustad's absence, Dilnavaz intends to report Roshan's mystifying relapse to Miss Kutpitia, but the doorbell rings. Dilnavaz does not recognize Dinshawji, so greatly has he changed. She is in no mood for any silliness, but sees Dinshawji is somber. He is carrying a newspaper and a bulky envelope. He asks for Gustad. It is very important. Dilnavaz invites him in, seats him on the sofa, and sends Tehmul to stop to call Gustad back from the bus stop.

Roshan sits next to the man who made her birthday celebration glow. Dinshawji hopes he can feel funny again for her. Tehmul is too late to catch Gustad. Dinshawji steadily grows more distressed and timorous. Tehmul begs Roshan to let him touch her doll, but is sent away. Roshan sings school songs for Dinshawji, much to her mother's surprise. Dinshawji continues playing games with the delighted little girl until Roshan tires and goes to bed, without her doll. The visitor's anxiety returns.

Gustad is confrontational when he reaches the clinic. Standard remedies are not working. He needs to talk with Dr. Paymaster. The doctor is in an ill mood at the end of a day spent trying to convince his foolish neighbors that democratic processes will eventually force the municipality to meet their demands. There is no need for sinking to the rowdyism of the ruling party and organizing a demonstration. He wins them over only to be stymied by the gas utility. Paymaster growls about everyone thinking he is a doctor, and gives Gustad a new list of pills. Gustad then growls about how doctors think everyone else is stupid.

Limping past the House of Cages, Gustad is stopped by Peerbhoy, who sells him a remedy for leg pain. Before getting on the bus, Gustad spits out half the potion, which makes his mouth feel funny. Outside Khodadad Building, he gets rid of the rest. The numbness has spread to his mind. He is surprised to see Dinshawji. Dilnavaz is disgusted by traces of the *paan*. Gustad reports that the doctor wants to put Roshan in the hospital, where everyone knows things get botched. Dinshawji agrees. You go there



only when you are ready to die. He had gone to Parsi General only when his wife had taken the doctor's side. Bed rest at home would have done more.

Dinshawji shows Gustad an article reporting that Jimmy Bilimoria has been arrested for fraud and extortion and that he has confessed to impersonating the prime minister to get the chief cashier of the State Bank of India to release 60 million rupees to "Bangladeshi Babu," the accused's alias. The money was to aid the guerrillas in East Pakistan because the bureaucrats were dragging their feet. The newspaper writer editorializes about how this raises grave questions of whether or not Mrs. Gandhi does this sort of thing regularly.

Gustad is stunned. He assures Dinshawji that he would not have put them both at risk if he had thought this possible. Bilimoria has been lying from the beginning. Dinshawji says calmly that they must decide what to do with the money. They should stop making deposits and ask Ghulam how to handle what is already in the account. Dilnavaz again suggests going to the police. That is too risky, Gustad feels. Peerbhoy has told Gustad Ghulam dropped by today. Gustad will seek out that dangerous man tomorrow. They do not yet know the whole story. The reporter has raised some valid questions. Dinshawji leaves. Tehmul approaches, begging to touch the doll. Gustad has no time or compassion tonight.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 breaks open the story. Bilimoria has been arrested for fraud and extortion and has confessed in detail. Indira Gandhi's arbitrary use of power has again been called into question. The Nobles and Dinshawji are affected. Sickly, old Dinshawji brings the news. Municipal politics are also heating up, we learn as a frustrated Gustad visits the dispensary to demand something that will actually cure his daughter. Dr. Paymaster, it turns out, is a political activist, trying to use the political system to get results before mob demonstrations become unavoidable. Talk about hospitals benefiting only the dying is ominous, given the tumor visible beneath Dinshawji's shirt. Tehmul is still obsessed with Roshan's doll. Clearly, it is not the minor motif it earlier appeared to be.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

On his way to Ghulam, Gustad sees a man striking a little girl, and restrains him. The man complains children have been harassing his customers all day. Gustad purchases a bottle of milk for the little girl, who shares it with her brothers. Gustad orders three chocolates for them. They do not know how to show their gratitude, but eventually fade into the crowd. Peerbhoy asks Gustad about his leg and tells him that Ghulam is on the top floor. The smell of the brothel is nauseating and the women gross. The rooms into which Gustad peeks are sordid.

Ghulam is expecting Gustad. Ghulam has lost his bandage and has grown a full beard grown a full beard. He is polite and courteous as ever. Over a desk hang framed pictures of Gandhi and Nehru. Ghulam confirms that Bilimoria is in jail, but refutes everything else as lies. Gustad demands an explanation for the money and decapitated animals. Ghulam says that RAW has no time for rats and cats, and that Bili Boy has enemies. Bili Boy will explain the money in time. He needs Gustad's trust and help. There is no sense in being upset with him. Bilimoria's life is in danger.

A scuffle in the back alley interrupts Gustad and Ghulam's conversation. The troublemaker is unmistakable: Tehmul is trying to get inside the brothel to touch the women. Hydraulic Hema has Tehmul by the ear. The whores are taking turns tormenting him. Gustad and Ghulam both intervene. No one is willing to accept Tehmul's rat bounty money and let him do what he wants. The rumor is that crazy men are hung like horses, so no one wants to get hurt. Ghulam sends the women back to work. Peerbhoy agrees to watch Tehmul until Gustad can take him home.

Gustad and Ghulam finish their business. Noble must withdraw the money already deposited so everything can be returned. Better to break the banking laws than have bones broken. Bili Boy, who is being tortured, confessed only to spare his friends the same trouble. The men have 30 days to comply. If Gustad fails, things will go badly for *all* of them. Ghulam will be at the House of Cages every evening. Gustad leaves worried and frightened. Tehmul is gone, but Peerbhoy has given him a *paan* to reduce his juice consumption.

Miss Kutpitia needs to examine the lime talisman to explain Roshan's relapse. Roshan has received a full dose of the evil eye. The old sorceress gives Dilnavaz two chunks of alum for a new potion and returns the lime rosary. The children must stay indoors during the full moon. Dilnavaz memorizes her new instructions and asks whether Sohrab will ever return. Do Tehmul's nails again and add a lock of his hair on the day after the new moon. They will not yet discuss the final remedy Miss Kutpitia once mentioned.

Dinshawji advises Gustad to comply with Ghulam's demands. They will withdraw two bundles a day. Dinshawji is strangely confident. Bilimoria's dubious confession has the



bank buzzing. It sounds fishy. Dinshawji's observations, cool courage, and good sense impress Gustad and he regrets misjudging him as a buffoon. Halfway through the 30-day period, Gustad finds his plants hacked to the ground. Bilimoria loved the vinca, so it must be a reminder from Ghulam.

Dinshawji accelerates the pace of withdrawals to three bundles a day. They finish five days ahead of schedule. Dinshawji waves off any need for thanks. No sooner does he expunge all trace of the fictitious account, than Dinshawji collapses and is rushed to Parsi General Hospital. Gustad rides with him. The patient says that when he felt the end approaching, he accelerated the pace. Dinshawji is chipper, singing an off color take off on the song "Home on the Range." His humor can once again flow freely.

Gustad asks that Miss Kutpitia's phone number be listed next to Alamai's. Heading back to work, Gustad sees a monarch butterfly, which reminds him of Sohrab.

Dilnavaz follows Miss Kutpitia's instructions carefully. Alum blobs bubble on the hot coals. Roshan watches before going to bed. Miss Kutpitia is delighted with the results. She asks Dilnavaz what the blobs look like. Dilnavaz's first guess is nuns' habits, but surely, those godly women could not want to harm Roshan. Miss Kutpitia is disappointed until Dilnavaz sees an animal snout. Rabadi has motive.

Gustad questions a new fragrance at the wall. Devotees are burning incense stick before favorite gods. It is a very good location, and the artist is wearing fashionable new clothes, but is still barefoot. He plans to change from perishable crayons to permanent oil and enamel. He offers brief hagiographies of several figures, including the story of the miracles at Mount Mary. Bamji drives up and rejoices that the wall has become piss-proof, although some neighbors are grumbling about the ecumenical selection. The more the merrier in a secular society.

Roshan is sobbing on the sofa. Her doll has vanished. Dilnavaz objects that she never leaves the door open, but remembers rushing to and from Miss Kutpitia's apartment. Gustad promises they will find the doll, by miracle if necessary.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter 14 sees Gustad seeking out Ghulam to find out what is going on in Bombay and what he and Dinshawji must do. They meet in the whorehouse. Ghulam reveals that Bilimoria has been tortured, and has made a false confession to shield his friends. They have 30 days to restore all the money. Dinshawji shows great resolve and courage in withdrawing the money five days ahead of schedule, then collapses and is rushed to the hospital. Clearly, his days are numbered, yet the buffoon is redeemed. It is good to see Dinshawji's sense of humor return. Gustad leaves his side with a heart open to kind thoughts about Sohrab.

The wall is becoming a place not only of pilgrimage, but also of some sectarian division. New treatments are tried to pull the evil magic out of Roshan. Her doll has disappeared.

Tehmul's sexual frustrations are rising, as shown by the ruckus he raises at the House of Cages, when he desperately seeks entry for a little fast rubbing.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Gustad is angry with Bilimoria when he delivers the money to Ghulam. Ghulam says that people at the very top have taken an interest in the case and that their mutual friend is in danger. Bili Boy wants Gustad to visit him in prison in Delhi, and will explain the complicated story in person. Gustad suspects another trick, and agrees to only think about it. The neighborhood around the House of Cages smells like the black wall before its transformation. Gustad wonders whether Dr. Paymaster and his colleagues are getting any satisfaction from the municipality.

Tehmul is waiting for Gustad in the compound, bearing a letter from the landlord. Tehmul thanks the tenants for signing the petition and promises to keep them informed of developments. Gustad takes a copy and tells Tehmul to distribute the rest.

Dinshawji shrinks in his hospital bed throughout October and into November, but the tumors enlarge. Gustad visits as often as possible, telling stories from the bank. Reading the note from Bilimoria, Dinshawji advises Gustad to go to Delhi. Gustad helps his friend eat dinner and eventually take over feeding him. Dinshawji is apologetic for taking Gustad's time. Gustad wonders how his friend manages when he is absent; for Dinshawji's wife is never present.

A new strict diet ordered for Roshan requires Gustad to visit Crawford Market weekly. The cost of her medications grows worrisome. Dilnavaz sells gold wedding bangles and delivers the money to her husband, too late for him to object. One Sunday, Gustad runs into Malcolm, who has given up on a career in music and is now employed by the municipality. They talk about Gustad's troubles. Malcolm asks whether or not Gustad has ever heard of Mount Mary. Gustad is startled to hear the name so soon after being told the story by the street artist. Malcolm assures him that the stories are true and that the Virgin Mary helps people of all faiths. Malcolm suggests a pilgrimage that afternoon. Gustad agrees. This is clearly pre-ordained. Riding home on the bus with his meat purchases, Gustad sees hatred in the eyes of a fat Hindu woman.

Overcoming guilt, Gustad lies about visiting Dinshawji, and heads for the train station. An old woman tries to sell Gustad and Malcolm candles for Mount Mary, but Malcolm sends her away. Better prices can be obtained at the shrine. A taxi driver also tries to sell them sacred supplies, but is turned down. Both vendors are resentful. Outside the shrine, large inventories of wax body parts are displayed, suitable for treating any ailment. Gustad pictures himself lying in Bonesetter's clinic. Malcolm explains the procedure, recommends Gustad pre-pay for his miracles, and helps him pick appropriate effigies. Malcolm explains that Gustad must personally pay the bill for a cure to occur. Gustad and Malcolm move into the hot, crowded church. Gustad follows his friend's lead, imitating his postures and gestures. Malcolm assures him that sweeping aside half-burned candles is proper form. Malcolm draws Gustad's attention



to the central icon and tells its miraculous story. Gustad prays for Roshan, Dinshawji, and Sohrab, but does not bother about his own hip.

The old friends sit a while on the shore, talking about the old days, and particularly the music that always filled Malcolm's home. Musical pieces and books always end before you are ready to let them go. That is life, just as is the terrible international situation. Gustad sits on the beach a while after thanking Malcolm and watching him walk away. He feels tranquil. As the sun sinks, Gustad remembers his grandfather's workshop, his father's carriage, and the wonderful family parties that always went on after he was put to bed. Tears are scalding Gustad's eyes. He will not allow them to flow, even though the sea would swiftly swallow them. Walking home from the station, Gustad has stories to tell Dinshawji tomorrow, to make up for missing today's visit.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 takes Gustad to the Christian shrine at Mount Mary, where the Virgin Mary is said to perform miracles of healing for people of all faiths. His old Catholic friend, Malcolm, whom he happens to meet in the market, guides him. Gustad's earlier reluctance to compromise his Parsi practices is overcome by having heard about the shrine from the street artist. Surely this must be ordained rather than just coincidence. Gustad, who consistently puts down his wife's superstitions, has run out of rational options for Roshan, Sohrab, and Dinshawji. Gustad's heart is softening. Tears almost flow. Clearly they will have to flow before Gustad's spirit can be free. Surely the lie about visiting Dinshawji cannot go unpunished.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Ghulam appears at the Nobles' door while Gustad is, supposedly, at the hospital. Dilnavaz barely conceals her hostility, but allows Ghulam to sit on the sofa and wait. Tehmul announces that there is an urgent phone call for Gustad, but Dilnavaz cannot leave the visitor alone. Gustad arrives, confers with Dilnavaz, and approaches Ghulam, while Dilnavaz goes to Miss Kutpitia's. Ghulam apologizes and promises this is the last time. Ghulam produces a newspaper article, which reports Bilimoria's request for retrial has been denied. The official charged with reviewing the evidence has been killed in a car accident, and his replacement concluded the matter rapidly. Sentencing is to follow shortly. It had been Bilimoria's last chance, says Ghulam. They will finish him off. Gustad tries to sound hard, but Ghulam presses gently on, stressing their old brotherly love. Gustad accepts a train ticket.

Dilnavaz is surprised to find the men chatting pleasantly as Ghulam prepares to leave. She is suspicious of the arrangement. Dinshawji has died an hour ago. She had thought her husband had just been at the hospital. When Gustad explains the trip to Mount Mary, and Dilnavaz realizes she and her husband have reached the same point by different paths. Gustad laments that there was no miracle for Dinshawji, and refuses to be comforted. By silencing his friend, Gustad hastened Dinshawji's death. Dilnavaz encourages Gustad to let his tears flow, but he defiantly holds them back. Roshan is happy to see them embracing. They are surprised that she remembers every detail about Dinshawji at her birthday celebration, but are upset when she suggests she too will die. Gustad sets out for the hospital. Cavasji and Mrs. Pastakia are both screaming in the compound.

Visiting hours are over, but a nurse admits Gustad to see his friend's body. Dinshawji was heavily sedated at the end, and alone. All the tubes and wires are removed. Soon the vultures will dismantle his bones, and he will exist in memory alone. When Gustad and Dinshawji's other friends are gone, what then? Gustad thinks of topics he wishes he had shared with Dinshawji.

The widow Alamai appears, tall, stern, and scrawny, and casts Gustad a withering look. Gustad almost smiles when he thinks of the Domestic Vulture picking clean Dinshawji's bones. Instead, he offers condolences. A pasty-faced young man bursts in frantically and is hushed by his Auntie. Nusli pouts at the scolding. Alamai introduces Pappa's best friend to the nephew she and Dinshawji raised as their own. The Tower of Silence is dispatching a hearse, so Gustad offers to ride along to calm Nusli.

Drained, Gustad goes out to walk the dark hospital grounds. He remembers a family vacation when he had been eight. His mother had tucked him into bed behind mosquito netting. Her smile through the thin veiling was the same as he remembered it being her 10 years later, as she lay dead. The hotel manager, a friend of Gustad's father, had



served a special dessert in an edible bowl. To Gustad, it had symbolized the end of vacation, and he had refused to eat it. Later, the bowl became for him a symbol of the bankrupt bookstore. Gustad gives in to sleep.

The hearse's horn wakes Gustad. He hurries to the lobby. Alamai is angry Gustad was gone so long. Gustad fights resentment. The attendants are sorry, but they cannot transport the deceased's trunk to his home. They just go straight to the Tower. Gustad comforts the cringing, terrified nephew. Alamai's hypocritical tears disgust Gustad. At the gates to the Tower, the tears turn to great sobs. Gustad thinks how Dinshawji would enjoy watching the Domestic Vulture carrying on like Tom Jones over Delilah.

Alamai has failed to arrange the level of funeral service Dinshawji is to receive, so Gustad asks the disdainful driver to return to the office. Impatient with the widow, Gustad helps her focus on practical matters, such as if there is to be one day of mourning or four. The funeral will be tomorrow afternoon. The clerk promises to submit the obituary notice to the newspaper.

Gustad and Alamai return to the van and proceed to the verandah where the body will receive a final bath of ritual purity in *gomez*, bull urine. Alamai demands they substitute warm water; for they are modern people. Gustad is embarrassed and takes Nusli off to do his *kusti*. Alamai is angry with Nusli for forgetting his prayer cap. Gustad makes peace by covering the boy's head with a folded handkerchief. Gustad is near patience's end with the widow.

The body is brought in, clad in white, face and ears uncovered. A priest lights an oil lamp and prepares frankincense. Nusli fidgets through the silent prayers and is thumped soundly by his aunt. The *dustoorji's* voice reminds Gustad of Nat King Cole, rich as velvet. Light flickers across Dinshawji's face as prayers slowly fill the dark room. Gustad falls under the spell and forgets everything else. Music soothes him. The words of the dead language he has mouthed without comprehension all his life come alive tonight. Verses from the Avesta mingle with sounds of the night. Gustad understands everything.

Dilnavaz is asleep on the sofa when Gustad comes home at 11:30. Gustad narrates the evening's events, but stops when he comes to the prayers, feeling foolish at how they moved him. Dilnavaz pushes him to explain. He replies that prayer is powerful enough to put a smile on a dead man's face. He hopes that will be the scene when he dies.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Chapter 16 deals with religion and death. We finally meet Dinshawji's "Domestic Vulture" and can appreciate why he spoke of his wife this way. Gustad, guilty about letting his friend die alone, finds himself responsible for mediating between the unsympathetic widow and her equally unsympathetic, sniveling, childlike nephew. Having just seen Gustad imitating Catholic rituals, hoping for a miracle, we see him in his more familiar Parsi environment after no miracle occurs. A hint is given that Parsis



are divided over the suitability of some ancient practices in a modern age and the power that rituals hold, even when the words are incomprehensible. Gustad had been struck by the sea of candlelight at Mount Mary's and now is amazed at how a single oil lamp can put a smile on a corpse's lips. A lifetime of rituals cheerfully performed is elevated to true awe as Dinshawji's passing is marked.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Bank manager Madon assigns which employees will attend the Monday funeral and which will attend the Uthamna Ceremony on Tuesday. Only Gustad is given a choice. Gustad chooses the funeral. Madon offers him a ride. Few relatives, but very many colleagues and friends attend. Non-Parsis are segregated. Gustad thinks about all the laughter Dinshawji has provided. Alamai takes advantage of the moment to tell Madon that her late husband had hoped Nusli would one day work beside him. Nusli is like a child, watching the *char-chassam* dog circle the bier, sniffing in silence. Alamai wails at the proof her husband has truly left her. Gustad shakes his head at this orthodox performance by a modernist woman, as other women restrain her from rushing to the bier. The *dustoorjis* wait patiently for pious phrases to calm her. The Ahunavad Gatha prayers proceed without interruption. Final obeisances are made and the *nassasalers* arrive to carry the body to the well of vultures. Gustad wishes he could help, but professional pallbearers are the rule. They are treated as outcasts and untouchables. Dinshawji's face is covered. The white-clad men carry him out. Only the men are allowed to line up for the march to the Tower. Gustad takes charge of Nusli. They leave Alamai, who stands with dignity, finally weeping silent, sincere tears. Gustad wonders about the strange couple's love and life.

The procession leaves the paved road, and Gustad is struck by the crunching sound of footsteps on the gravel path. It is a fitting sound, he thinks for death. He remembers hearing it on past funeral walks for grandparents and parents, whose stories still live in his mind. At the Tower, last farewells are made, and then the *nassalers* carry the body inside and close the door. All know Dinshawji will be stripped naked as the day he was born. Vultures circle overhead, and Gustad comforts Nusli that all is well. The mourners move to a terrace and are given prayer books. On signal, they begin praying for Dinshawji's ascending soul. The vultures descend, grim and silent. The prayer books are collected. The mourners wash, do their *kustis*, and rejoin the world of the living. Impulsively, Gustad tells Madon he needs Friday and Saturday off work.

Rail workers have gone on strike when Gustad reaches the Victoria Terminus, and crowds of delayed travelers are making do. Malfunctioning loudspeakers garble announcements. Armed soldiers patrol the tracks. The government has promised essential services will be maintained, so Gustad still has hopes of reaching Delhi. He enters the swarm of people. Red-shirted coolies hawk reserved seats for ten rupees on the officially unreserved train. Gustad purchases one and is admitted to a packed compartment. A porter finds Gustad's seat. A well-dressed man in his 30's lies above, stretched out on the luggage rack. Gustad smiles politely.

As the 24-hour trip begins, the travelers' mood becomes lighter, now that territorial rights are no longer in question. The luggage rack man asks if this is Gustad's first trip to Delhi. The man in the luggage rack is going there to select a wife at his parents'



request. Gustad dislikes be taken into the man's confidence. Dinshawji fills Gustad's mind, random thoughts about how the man had helped him adjust to bank life, about how he had made people laugh, about the long, worthwhile journey Dinshawji had taken. Gustad falls asleep in his seat.

Dilnavaz is worried about Gustad, but knows he must learn the truth in order to find peace. Although Roshan is feeling much better, Miss Kutpitia continues warning Dilnavaz she must complete the exorcism. Dilnavaz knows Sohrab's absence is troubling Gustad, although he will not admit it. Why is that spell not yet working?

Rabadi rings the doorbell after reciting Dustoorji Baria's latest "Prayer to Strengthen the Righteous." Relieved that Gustad is not home, he asks to talk to Dilnavaz. Rabadi demands she stop Darius from touching his daughter's buttocks. The whole building is watching. Darius checks to see if his mother needs help, and forces the door closed in the crazy man's face. Rabadi trips over Dimple, and stalks off, threatening to lodge complaints for assault and molestation. Darius explains to his mother that Jasmine wants to learn to ride her bicycle, but needs help balancing. None of the other boys have enough stamina. Dilnavaz orders Darius to stay away from the girl because Jasmine's crackpot father is capable of anything. Dilnavaz suddenly understands the alum blobs. Roshan has been growing thinner while Jasmine grows fatter. Dilnavaz has a potion to prepare and then must find some way to wet Rabadi's scalp with it.

After midnight, the luggage-rack man wakes Gustad and offers to trade places. Gustad thanks him and crawls into the rack. Gustad dreams about the honeymoon trip he and Dilnavaz had taken, impatient to begin their intimacies. Dilnavaz had stroked his thigh, then his crotch, and then had fumbled with his fly buttons. Gustad realizes he is not dreaming and lashes out with his elbow. In the morning, the luggage-rack man has a black eye. Gustad buys him a cup of tea, feeling sorry for the wife he will select.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Chapter 17 describes the Parsi funeral rituals, culminating with the descent of vultures to strip the corpse's bones bare of flesh. Gustad is put on a crowded train to Delhi, showing slices of life in an Indian rail station and passenger car. A confrontation with the crazed Mr. Rabadi confirms Dilnavaz's hunch that he cast the evil eye on Roshan. We see that Miss Kutpitia has given Dilnavaz a new potion. The community's two mystics are again pitted against each other through warring intermediaries. Darius explains the innocent story behind Rabadi's ravings.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Gustad is happy to get off the train. It is invigoratingly cold in Delhi in December. Gustad takes a rickshaw to the nondescript grey prison, and enters the reception area, feeling nauseated. He asks for Mr. S. Kashyap, as instructed. The thickset, smiling official tells him that Bilimoria has been moved to the hospital section, suffering jungle sickness, and leads Gustad there. Kashyap's cleated heels bring back memories of the loss of the bookstore. Another official leads Gustad upstairs, explaining that Jimmy Bilimoria is sometimes delirious and is allowed only 30-minute visits. Since Gustad has come all the way from Bombay, however, he may stay until his return train leaves at 3 PM.

Bilimoria's room has an armed guard. The room is stifling. Bilimoria is asleep, breathing with difficulty. The sight makes Gustad want to weep. His friend is a shadow of the powerfully built man he had known a year and a half earlier. Jimmy's eyes flutter open and he tries to speak Gustad's name. Gustad instantly forgets and forgives everything, and feels guilty for wanting this enfeebled creature to explain himself. After 30 minutes, Bilimoria recovers his speech. He explains that he receives regular injections to fight whatever tropical disease he contracted in Sundarbans. The injections are terrible, debilitating him for about an hour. Learning they have four hours together, Bilimoria says they must hurry. He feels no peace. He asks about Gustad's family. Gustad chooses his words carefully, omitting the rat and cat, Sohrab, and Roshan's illness. Bilimoria misses Khodadad Building and wishes he had never accepted the job in Delhi. He will be allowed home after serving his four-year sentence. From Ghulam, Gustad knows better, but says nothing. Bilimoria talks about joining RAW as a management consultant, meeting the prime minister, and being surprised and sickened that she was using RAW to spy on everyone. He had applied for a transfer.

Bilimoria shifts to events in Pakistan and the army's slaughter of Bengali demonstrators. A superior had told him the prime minister was interested in having him help the guerrilla movement. Bilimoria's mind shifts to Sohrab and Darius, but Gustad wants to keep him on the political topic. The prime minister had put Bilimoria in charge of training and supplying the tough and able Mukti Bahini fighters. Jimmy recalls the ceremonies attending the birth of Bangladesh and the Pakistani air force's brutal response.

A sinewy, sharp-faced nurse enters at 1 PM and administers an injection. Jimmy fades, talking about how the prime minister had appeared to lose interest in the guerrillas, but then gave him instructions to withdraw funds from the State Bank in her name. The monies would be replaced once direct support is authorized. He was told to identify himself as Bangladeshi Babu. She was protecting herself and trapping him. Jimmy falls into restless sleep. Gustad takes a break, exhausted.

As Miss Kutpitia has instructed, Dilnavaz prepares a fine paste of lime, chilies, and milk, adds a variety of ground seeds. Lifting Gustad's blackout paper, she finds mouse



droppings and a spider, whose egg case she must carefully remove. She adds these ingredients and warms the mixture, then adds the alum pieces. Her potion is ready for the dogwalla idiot. Dilnavaz knows that on Saturdays, Rabadi treats Dimple to an extra midday walk, and she waits for him upstairs. She empties the saucepan and hears Rabadi's resounding roar, but dares not look down. When the potion reaches his eyes, Rabadi shrieks that he is dying. He calls down curses on the building's residents as Dimple leaps about him happily. Dilnavaz returns to her kitchen and scrubs the pan, knowing Miss Kutpitia will be proud of her. Roshan wonders why the idiot dogwalla is shouting. Dilnavaz admonishes her language, but rejoices that her daughter is tired of sleeping all day. Is this coincidence or miracle?

Dilnavaz presses Miss Kutpitia for a final remedy for Sohrab. The old lady understands a mother's sorrow over a lost son and relents, after warning that the consequences are on Dilnavaz's head. Dilnavaz shudders, but accepts. Miss Kutpitia fetches a lizard and ties it in a box. Dilnavaz is to hide it under Sohrab's bed until morning. Bring it and Tehmul to her apartment tomorrow. Rabadi glares at Dilnavaz as she returns to her home and does as she is instructed.

Jimmy awakens and resumes his story. The prime minister, fearing her many enemies, had come up with a cover story. She had asked Bilimoria to sign a confession for her to use in Parliament in case of repercussions. Foolishly, Bilimoria had trusted her. Gustad is baffled by such naivety. Jimmy struggles to smile, thinking of the Sundays he had spent with the Nobles, then resumes the narrative. Guerrilla operations had been going well when funding suddenly ended. He and Ghulam both nosed around too much, which is what had brought Ghulam to his Lambretta "accident." They had discovered the prime minister's office had rerouted the money to a private account, to finance her son's factory or to fund an election. Jimmy realizes now he should have alerted the press.

Suddenly, Jimmy screams and thrashes around, flashing back to the prison beatings he endured. He had decided that if the dishonest politicians could bleed India dry for their own profit, he and his friends should also enjoy some comfort, so he set up the Chor Bazaar scheme. He would resign and return home to divide the money Gustad deposited. Two wrongs, he knew, would not make a right. Still, he was disgusted and was sure it would work. How would the prime minister's office miss 10 million rupees out of 50 million? The officials discovered Jimmy's scheme and arrested him, demanding the 10 million back. Jimmy had refused, to protect Gustad and Ghulam. He had been promised proper treatment once the money was back.

Gustad is appalled at the sufferings Jimmy has endured, and wants to go to lawyers and the newspapers. Jimmy says that everything is in their pockets. He will just serve his four years quietly. Gustad sees his friend needs absolution, and tells him there is nothing to forgive. They talk on about the old times until another injection is administered. They say goodbye before the drug silences Jimmy. Gustad kisses his friend's forehead and heads to the train station. While Gustad sleeps on the crowded train, the prime minister announces to the country that Pakistan has bombed multiple targets in India and that the nation is at war.



Chapter 18 Analysis

In a Delhi prison hospital ward, Gustad confronts the shrunken shadow of his once-powerful friend and learns the truth about the money he and Dinshawji had manipulated in and out of a fictitious bank account. The depth of corruption in Indira Gandhi's government is laid out. A disenchanting war hero decides he and his friends deserve a piece of the proverbial pie. Underestimating the accuracy of the official thieves' accounting leads to Bilimoria's downfall. Loyalty to his friends lands Bilimoria the hospital from which he naively believes he will emerge alive. At home, Dilnavaz completes one spell, apparently curing her daughter, and prepares for another, intended to return her son back to the nest. The novel is now set during war conditions. The prime minister announces that Pakistan has launched an unprovoked attack.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Dilnavaz must finish her sorcery while Gustad is away. She collects the lizard and summons Tehmul, who expects his daily limejuice. Miss Kutpitia has something for him instead, Dilnavaz promises, and he sets off grinning. The old lady hurries them through the outer door, and then unlocks an inner door no one has seen. The dimly lit room is shrouded in cobwebs and dust. Dilnavaz realizes that this was nephew Farad's bedroom, left untouched after his fatal car accident 35 years ago. Everything was as Farad left it. The adjoining room is open too, the law office of Farad's father, likewise enshrouded in webs and dust.

Miss Kutpitia pulls out the lizard and kills it on Farad's desk. She snips off two inches of wriggling tail. Dilnavaz blanches. Tehmul is fascinated. She inserts the tail into a wick holder, dips it in oil, and floats it in a lamp glass. Miss Kutpitia asks Tehmul if he wants to have some fun, and instructs him to pay close attention to the glass. Tehmul giggles at the still squirming, floating tail. Dilnavaz leaves the room before Miss Kutpitia strikes a match and flees. It is very dangerous to see the flame, she explains to Dilnavaz. Tehmul giggles for ten minutes before he is called out and sent to play in the compound. Miss Kutpitia tells Dilnavaz that it will take a few days before Tehmul begins to change. Miss Kutpitia does not know that the wriggling tail has escaped the glass and set fire to Farad's desk.

Gustad returns to see the last vacant spots on the wall filled in. The aroma of floral offerings sweetens the air, relieving Gustad's exhaustion. What a contrast to the stench of old! The black wall has become a shrine for all races and religions. The artist commends Gustad's vision, but Gustad gives all credit to the artist's talent. The new oil paintings are even better than the original crayon renderings. The artist is planning to build himself a small shelter by the wall. He gives Gustad a careful tour of recent work. Even Yellamma is depicted, the Hindu protector of prostitutes. So too, is the wall of Khodadad Building, intricately detailed: wall within wall within wall. The wall is sacred like the other places portrayed on it. One last figure remains to be rendered, suggested by Rabadi. He produces a photograph of Dustoorji Baria, a miracle-working Parsi holy man. The artist has begun rendering his portrait when Inspector Bamji sees it and begins ranting that the man is a charlatan. Policeman and dog-walker argue. Bamji gives up. Rabadi tells how the priest's framed photograph had wept tears after Tiger died, sure proof of his saintliness. The artist does not know what to believe about Dustoorji Baria. Gustad is certain pilgrims to the wall will become more numerous, now that war has come.

A fire engine races into the compound and Tehmul runs out, babbling. All reminders of Miss Kutpitia's nephew and brother had been reduced to ash, but the rest of the apartment was divinely spared from the flames. Some people ascribed the good fortune to the prayers rising at the wall. Miss Kutpitia accepts the loss matter-of-factly, even



cheerily, enjoying people's sympathy. Only she understands the mystery of the benign fire.

Dilnavaz listens to Jimmy's story between her chores and helping Miss Kutpitia clear the mess. Dilnavaz is happy for the first time in months, all her shame, terror, and guilt having been consumed in those flames. She is certain Jimmy will come home in four years. Only Sohrab's absence concerns her, and she is sure this will turn out well. By contrast, Gustad is concerned about the war, and enlists Darius to help to seal any cracks in the old blackout paper. Gustad sees his powerful, gentle, and just grandfather in Darius as the young man wields the inherited hammer. Holding the hammer, Darius understands the old family stories, told anew. Father and son shield the light bulbs, position the heavy four-poster bed optimally to serve as an air raid shelter, and stow emergency provisions beneath it. Gustad is as excited as a child, and Dilnavaz seizes the moment to enlist him to prepare Miss Kutpitia's windows for blackout conditions.

Gustad steps out into the night to inspect the building for light leaks. Bamji is also inspecting, and exudes confidence over how the Indians will alienate the Pakistanis. The building is well-prepared, but Bamji remembers '65. People will get careless soon enough.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Gustad returns from Delhi exhausted, but is exhilarated by the nearly finished wall of holy images. The transformation has been amazing. Pilgrims will grow in numbers now that war has begun. The only blot is the inclusion of Mr. Rabadi's beloved Dustoorji Baria, whose photography, Rabadi alleges, shed tears at the passing of his first dog, Tiger. The ecumenical artist refuses to pass judgment on any holy man's authenticity. A fire in Miss Kutpitia's apartment interrupts the conversation. The flaming lizard's tail had ignited a dried out composition book. Tehmul had mentioned this, but in his incomprehensible manner, the fire consumes all of Miss Kutpitia's 35-year-old artifacts, but causes no other damage. This liberates the old woman from past grief. She is transformed into a happy lady.

People are willing to see the wall as offering miraculous protection to the building. War is at hand, however. Government regulations require strict blackout measures. Gustad enlists Darius to help check his old preparations and prepare a sound air raid center. Gustad sees his grandfather in Darius, and is happy that the family building legacy will continue, even if not through Sohrab, the first born, as would have been fitting. Inspecting the building's outside that night, Gustad is happy to see that Tehmul's brother has secured the windows of his apartment before leaving on business.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Mr. Madon issues prim air raid procedures. Employees discuss how the Pakistanis' debauched, alcoholic, and syphilitic president will lead his country to defeat. The Indian army is doing brilliantly in Bangladesh, supported by the selfless Indian population. Mother India and Mother Indira are being blurred in the media. Shiv Sena patrols are patriotically roaming the city looking for improperly secured windows and anyone who might be portrayed as enemy agents. Six days into the conflict, the U.S. Seventh Fleet is ordered into the Bay of Bengal. Nixon and Kissinger are universally reviled. Their pictures are cut out of newspapers as a target for defecation. The Soviets, bound to India by a Treaty of Friendship, dispatch an armada of their own. The Americans back down.

Cavasji is ranting at the heavens about the bombs certain to come and cuts off further offerings of sandalwood to God. His son pulls him inside.

By the third night, Gustad and Dilnavaz ignore the midnight air raid siren, but this time Indian anti-aircraft guns are heard opening up on what must be Pakistani bombers. Dilnavaz hopes aloud that Sohrab is safe. Gustad is uneasy as he steps outside to make sure no idiot lets light escape from a window by looking out. Searchlights crisscross the sky. Tehmul's window is lit. Gustad storms up to Tehmul's apartment to scare him. Letting himself in with the key that had been entrusted to him, Gustad hears panting, heavy breathing, and moans. He pushes a threadbare curtain aside and enters a stinking room. Tehmul's back is to the door, so Gustad's yell frightens him more than was intended. He spins to reveal an enormous erection that he does not stop stroking until he ejaculates with a whimper. Gustad sees his daughter's doll, as naked as Tehmul, lying in the apartment's clutter. Its clothing is draped neatly on a chair. Gustad, embarrassed and enraged, orders Tehmul to stop immediately and flings him filthy pajamas lying on the floor. Tehmul begins to blubber. The doll is spattered with many nights worth of dried semen, easily cleaned off. Gustad cannot think about returning the doll to Roshan. He decides to donate it to an orphanage.

Eventually Gustad understands that Tehmul took the doll after the prostitutes had turned him down. Gustad feels sorry for the child's mind dealing with a man's urges. Gustad returns to the open window shades, wishing he had the power of miracles to heal Tehmul's ills and restore him to normal human dignity. Gustad cannot bear to take away the doll. Someday he will explain the loss to Roshan. Gustad warns him to keep the window shut at night and tells him to keep the dolly. Tehmul slobbers a kiss on Gustad's knuckles. Gustad pats Tehmul's shoulder.

Gustad is relieved when he gets back into the fresh night air. The guns are silent. Gustad will not explain in front of the children why it took so long to secure Tehmul's window.



Gustad goes to the dispensary to tell Dr. Paymaster the good news that Roshan is well now and to ask if the medications can be discontinued. The doctor uses medical images to talk about Bangladesh and the unresponsive municipal authorities. People in his neighborhood are fed up. Peerbhoy's brass tray sounds outside like a gong. Gustad is curious. A crowd larger than usual has gathered outside the House of Cages, enduring dreadful sewer smells. Peerbhoy is exhorting them action for the common good, railing colorfully and suggestively at the profligate Pakistani leadership. The prostitutes object that he is ruining their business, but Peerbhoy presses on. He has invented and is now selling a new product, "Patriotic Paan." Gustad tears himself away, knowing Dilnavaz will be fretting since he is out after curfew. He finds Tehmul in the compound, on hands and knees, rooting in the dust for the dolly's bracelet.

Patriotic euphoria follows the unconditional defeat of the Pakistanis, but quickly fades. Once again, Gustad refuses to take down the blackout paper. The air raid shelter is dismantled, however. The pavement artist has finished his lean-to at the far end of the wall and moved in. He is now kept busy serving as the shrine's custodian. Victory in Bangladesh has been profitable. Dilnavaz scans the obituaries in Miss Kutpita's copy of "Jam-E-Jamshed" every morning, fearing she might miss the funeral of some relative. Gustad reads the paper during lunch. He is taking pride in stories of the national victory when a tiny notice catches his eye. J. Bilimoria, former RAW officer, has died in a New Delhi prison. Gustad pockets the page.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Chapter 20 focuses on Gustad's discovery of what happened to Roshan's beloved doll. The breaking of the blackout, indeed, provides the occasion for it. Spurned even by prostitutes, Tehmul had stolen the long-admired object to help him gain relief in masturbation. First shocked and angered, Gustad realizes the tragedy of this child trapped in a grown man's body and lets him keep the doll. His wish that a miracle could restore poor Tehmul to human dignity runs counter to Dilnavaz's using Tehmul as a vessel for drawing the dark spirits out of Sohrab. War has brought prosperity to the sidewalk artist and responsibility as guardian of this new sanctuary. This surely is too good to continue. Ethnic tensions rose during the brief war, Bilimoria has died in prison, and Dr. Paymaster's neighbors have run out of patience with the municipal authorities.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Peerbhoy's followers are ready to march on the municipal offices to demand action. They want to march in their work clothes and display their work implements. They recruit a reluctant but prestigious Dr. Paymaster, who is convinced the suffering cutting out the gangrenous infection at the local level can save body politic of India. The doctor will march in white coat and stethoscope and carry his distinctive black bag. Four handcarts of gutter filth and other debris are gathered to illustrate the neighborhood's plight. The group has prepared banners and placards are prepared has rehearsed slogans. The police mobilize to control traffic and to make sure non-violence will prevail. Mistry portrays Paymaster and Peerbhoy as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza sallying forth. They are invited to the head of the cheering column.

Dilnavaz finds J. Bilimoria's funeral listed in the paper, and shows it to Gustad. Jimmy has no known relatives, so Gustad wonders who might have made arrangements. Gustad heads to the Tower of Silence, not raging at the heavens like Cavasji, but wishing he could. Had Dilnavaz not happened upon the obituary, Jimmy would have had no one to pray for his passage. So many had walked the gravel path for Dinshawji, yet Gustad walks alone for Jimmy. Tower employees are so often put upon by survivors that they routinely refuse special requests, so Gustad is unable to learn who made arrangements for Jimmy.

Residents of the luxury high rises around the Tower have been protesting the vultures dropping tidbits on their balconies. Reformist and traditionalist Parsis have been debating whether to cave in to Hindu demands that they switch to cremation. Ornithologists weigh in on vulture behavior. No scientific analysis has been made of the offending dropping to determine whether they are human, and sensationalists have suggest hired pilots might be throwing meat to put pressure on the "vulturists." Clerks are trained to avoid saying anything that might feed the controversy. Gustad gives up and heads home. At the gate, he sees a taxi driven by someone with a moustache just like Jimmy's.

Malcolm has a new demolition project beginning today. Working for the municipality is boring, but provides a regular paycheck, unlike trying to teach music to spoiled children. A colleague lost his pension for demolishing a wrong structure, so Malcolm pays attention to plans. The work site, Khodadad building, is familiar but strikes no vital memory.

As usual, Sohrab arrives during banking hours, hugs his mother, and dismisses her pleas that he return for good. Gustad will be home soon. Sohrab is surprised to hear that his father is taking off time from work. Dilnavaz fills her son in on everything that has been happening. Sohrab is shocked, but is convinced it will do no good to talk to his



father; as he has spoiled all of Gustad's dreams. Sohrab agrees stay and talk, to make his mother happy.

Gustad recognizes the taxi driver and realizes he paid for Jimmy's funeral. Ghulam admits it, emotionally. As a non-Parsi, he had been not allowed to attend. Ghulam had not contacted Gustad because he had been determined to keep his promise never to bother him again. He drives Gustad home, gratis. Ghulam is still working in RAW. He feels he is safer inside than out. Ghulam swears that someone will pay for killing Bilimoria. Ghulam will be patient. Gustad is frightened by such talk. When a police officer diverts them to a detour, Gustad shakes hands and walks the rest of the way home. He knows he will never meet Ghulam again.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Chapter 21 shows the working classes preparing to march on city hall to publicize their sewer problems. When Mistry characterizes their leaders, Dr. Paymaster and Peerbhoy, as Miguel Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, it indicates the quest is futile and illusory, however well-intentioned. Gustad's friend Malcolm, having accepted a municipal job, is dispatched to demolish something at Khodadad Building, but doesn't realize what it is. Gustad is Bilimoria's sole mourner, and meets for a last time their intermediary, Ghulam, who is intent on revenge. Ghulam implicitly admits carrying out the rat, cat, and bush incidents. Sohrab makes objections about waiting for his father's return home, but seems ready to try for rapprochement.

Much of the chapter is given over to describing battles between vulturists and reformists over Parsi funeral practices that many find macabre in the modern age. There is more than a touch of humor in the description, couched in the context of harried clerks not wanting to get involved in anything not in their job description.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Seeing the painted wall as he drives up tells Malcolm why Khodadad Building sounded familiar. The artist crumbles when he learns his work will be destroyed and is unable to summon the strength that earlier had allowed him cheerfully to move on when roused. The neem tree in the compound must be removed. The marchers bound for the municipal office turn noisily into the lane, wearing their work clothes, bearing their work implements (allowed after a police attempt to forbid them carrying potential weapons), and voicing both clever chants and hackneyed slogans. The column halts before the wall and chants, "Will not do!"

Malcolm and his crew line up at the curb. All work ends in the neighborhood. A march leader declares they will stop at this sacred wall to pray for blessings on their future endeavors. Marchers queued up before favorite deities and performed the gestures appropriate to their cult. Many leave a donation. One of Malcolm's workers advises them to save their money, since the wall is coming down. The marchers cannot believe this. Emotions quickly elevate to outrage. The marchers intend to thwart this Satanic scheme. Malcolm is uncomfortable, but orders are orders. Not only will the monstrous municipality not fix their sewers, it now wants to take away their sacred wall. Malcolm's crew members are torn between religion and paychecks. Fearsome Hydraulic Hema stands before Yellamma's image and threatens to castrate the crew if they harm the wall.

Gustad is in a hurry to change out of his prayer garb and get back to the bank. He arrives at Khodadad Building in time to see Hydraulic Hema take her stand. Malcolm spots Gustad and waves him over. The police are trying to stay out of the matter until reinforcements arrive. Gustad wonders what Malcolm is doing in a rowdy march. Gustad sees the woebegone artist and the elated Tehmul. Gustad warns Tehmul to stay safely inside the compound. Gustad tries to console the artist. Seeing Dr. Paymaster in high spirits and acting like a rebel general, Gustad asks him what is going on. The doctor says that this stop is unplanned and that it is "an act of God." Denizens of the building are debating the outcome at the gate, and Gustad joins them. Inspector Bamji refuses to step into the fray. When Sohrab steps out, father and son see one another for the first time in seven months. Malcolm returns from phoning the municipality for instructions. He tells Gustad that he is in charge of the project. The city will not yield to mob rule. Gustad cannot convince his friend to seek safety in the compound. Malcolm returns to the trucks. Cavasji rails at heaven, but his words are drowned out as savage street fighting begins.

The construction workers are outnumbered but are well armed with pickaxes and crowbars. Police stand back. The flight of many objects intrigues Tehmul, and Gustad orders him inside. Tehmul sees it as a giant game of catch, like he plays with the teasing compound children. What fun it would be to catch something for once. As



Gustad yells, Tehmul tries to catch a sailing brick, but misjudges and is hit on the head. Gustad hears the crack as Tehmul drops without making a sound. Gustad sends Sohrab to fetch Dr. Paymaster. Miss Kutpitia leaves to phone for an ambulance. Gustad tries to stop the blood. Tehmul's skull is caved in. A subdued Paymaster arrives, shakes his head, and goes through doctorly motions. Tehmul whispers, clearly, "Gustad. Thank you, Gustad," and expires. Perhaps the ambulance should be canceled and a hearse substituted? Bamji says that ambulances will be needed for the many wounded. The neighbors debate what to do with Tehmul's body, but Gustad picks him up, alone, ignores everyone, and without faltering, carries Tehmul across the compound to the stairs. He pauses to look at the crowd, then climbs to the dead man's apartment.

Gustad lays Tehmul on his bed, after pushing the naked doll aside. Gustad dresses the doll and lays it beside his friend. He removes Tehmul's shoes and socks and finds the two rupee notes. He folds up Tehmul's pajama top to serve as an interim prayer cap so he can offer prayers. As he recites the prescribed words, over and over again, touching Tehmul's bloodied head, Gustad allows his tears to fall for Tehmul, for himself, for Jimmy, for Dinshawji, and for his parents and grandparents. How long Gustad prays and weeps he does not know. Sohrab stands behind him in the doorway. Gustad goes over to hug his son tightly.

The marchers have overturned a barrel of sewage onto the street. Gustad invites Malcolm in to wash up and have some tea. Malcolm declines. Someone had thrown a dead rat in Malcolm's face. He will visit his doctor and plans to light a candle at Mount Mary against plague. Now, he must wait for replacement workers and carry out the project. Gustad hears boots crunching in gravel. The sound freezes him. A first huge block of the wall is removed and demolished. The artist thanks Gustad for his hospitality and decides to move on, he knows not where. He leaves behind his oil paints, preferring to return to crayons. Gustad finds his lost prayer cap. The neem tree is coming down. Still hearing the crunch of gravel outside, Gustad stands on a chair to begin tearing down the blackout paper. A frightened moth flies out and circles the room.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The protest marchers come upon the painted wall and pause to pray for success. They learn the municipality has ordered the sacred site demolished. A fierce battle results. Innocent Tehmul, playing childish games, falls mortally wounded on the street. His last words make it obvious his mind has been cleared. The artist, who had begun to put down roots for the first time in his life, sees the foolishness of the quest for permanency in life as the Trimurti image is destroyed. He leaves behind the oil paints that were to have ensured his artwork would be waterproof. It is not government-proof, he realizes. There is little doubt he will bounce back. The reader may wonder if Sohrab and Gustad, so very alike in temperament, return to normal after their embrace or how Dilnavaz will take Tehmul's tragic death. These questions lie beyond the scope of the novel, though. Gustad is clearly changed by the long journey he has taken, and begins taking down the blackout paper.



Characters

Gustad Noble

The protagonist of the novel, Gustad Noble is a devotee of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. Nearing 60, Gustad's hair and beard are whitening, but his moustache is thick and black. Tall and broad-shouldered, he is the envy of relatives and friends. A slight limp recalls a serious accident nine years ago, suffered saving his son from a speeding car. Gustad loves to sing, modifying the verses of popular American songs. He has been married for 21 years to Dilnavaz, and they have two teenage sons, Sohrab and Darius, and a daughter, Roshan, who turns nine years old during the course of the novel.

Gustad feels obliged to keep some things secret from his outspoken wife. Gustad's early life has been scarred by the bankruptcy of his father's bookstore, which forced him to pay his own way through college. He has worked nearly 20 years in a bank, and wants more for his sons. He is determined Sohrab will attend IIT, followed by an American graduate school. He wants Sohrab to be successful, and will not accept opposition. Gustad has idealized his childhood and often links current events with images of the past.

Gustad is a natural leader, thwarted in the official bank hierarchy, but not in his limited community. People like him and seek him for advice and help. He is deeply sentimental but careful to hide this beneath gruffness. Gustad is stubborn, stereotyping people quickly, is willing to appreciate qualities he has earlier failed to perceive. Only Sohrab, so like him in temperament, is unforgivable and must make the first move for reconciliation to occur. The death of two friends affect Gustad greatly. It takes a third death before Gustad can shed tears and embrace his prodigal son.

Dilnavaz Noble

Gustad's outspoken wife of 21 years, age 52, Dilnavaz is superstitious, and is a slight woman with dark brown hair bobbed short, and hands that have aged too fast. Dilnavaz works from before dawn until bedtime and receives no help from her husband or strong sons. This has made her resentful. Dilnavaz has a sharp tongue that spares not even invited dinner guests. She is superstitious and perseveres in her beliefs even when Gustad mocks them. She has learned to work around problems. Her greatest concern is the conflict between Gustad and their son Sohrab. She is also very concerned about daughter Roshan's recurrent diarrhea. Dilnavaz fights down trepidation and allows a mysterious upstairs neighbor, Miss Kutpitia, to provide recipes for potions that will heal her two children. Dilnavaz never believes that their old family friend, Major Bilimoria, has abandoned them. While fearful that trouble could befall them, helps Gustad keep to the path fate has decreed he must follow.



Sohrab Noble

Gustad and Dilnavaz's 19-year-old son is shortly destined to begin studying at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Sohrab is an outstanding student. His father consistently supports his inquisitiveness, even when Sohrab decides to collect butterflies. Sohrab gave up this hobby out of pity for the creatures he was capturing and killing. Mechanical hobbies were better. Every one Sohrab succeeds with convinces his father he will turn it into a profitable career. Sohrab is as stubborn as his father, however, and leaves the family house rather than submit to demands he enroll in IIT.

Sohrab promises his distraught mother he will visit weekly, but during banking hours, so as to avoid his father. These visits grow less frequent as Dilnavaz keeps nagging Sohrab to give in. Surprisingly, Sohrab submits to one of her superstitions, circling a lime above his forehead to cast out the evil spirit that is keeping him away from home. Two months pass between visits when Sohrab finally arrives again. Dilnavaz fills him in on recent tragic events that have affected his father greatly. Sohrab agrees, with less resistance than usual, to stay and talk to his father. Sohrab follows Gustad to the apartment where Gustad bears the body of his slain friend, and accepts his father's bloody embrace.

Darius Noble

Gustad and Dilnavaz's 15-year-old son once collected tropical fish and bird. Later, Darius turns to body-building, like his grandfather had. Darius is a shorter reflection of his muscular father. A neighbor whom Darius' parents hate in general, Mr. Rabadi, charges that Darius is molesting his daughter, Jasmine. Darius explains to his mother that he is merely trying to help a shy girl learn to ride a bicycle. She has trouble with balance. None of the other boys have the stamina to run along side for long, steadying the seat. Darius lusts for her at night.

Roshan Noble

Gustad and Dilnavaz's laughing, fragile 9-year-old daughter, Roshan's ninth birthday is celebrated by serving a chicken fattened at home. Her great joy is a large, beautiful doll, imported from Italy, and clothed as a bride. She won it in a lottery. It is so valuable that her parents demand it be locked in a suitcase until a suitable display case can be prepared.

Like Darius when he was younger, Roshan suffers intestinal problems, which her parents treat without ongoing medical advice. Finally, Gustad takes her to see Dr. Paymaster. Roshan is put through painful tests and treatments, to no avail. Hospitalization is prescribed but put off. Roshan is allowed to have her dolly keep her company in her sickbed. Dilnavaz is so concerned about her daughter's continuing decline that she consults Miss Kutpitia and carries out a magic spell that appears to work.



Major Bilimoria

Gustad's former friend and neighbor, virtually a brother, has disappeared without a word, but has recently written asking a favor. Bilimoria had been a hero in the struggle for independence from Britain in 1948 and the war between India and Pakistan that followed. During the war he saves the life of a comrade, Ghulam Mohammed, who becomes his devoted follower ever after. While living in Khodadad Building, Jimmy Bilimoria became "Uncle Major" to the Noble children, to whom he was held up as an example of strength and integrity.

Dilnavaz refuses to believe evil about Bilimoria, even after reading his request that Gustad rendezvous with Ghulam, accept a package, and follow instructions without question. The package contains a large sum of cash. The request is that Gustad illegally deposit the money in his bank. Later, Ghulam reveals that "Bili Boy," the major's army nickname, has been arrested by the government and needs the money returned in full. Despite bitterness and suspicion, Gustad travels to Delhi to visit Bilimoria to learn the full truth. Now a forgiven friend, Jimmy tells how he realized he had been enlisted to help the rebels in Bangladesh, but was tricked by Indira Gandhi to laundering money. Bilimoria had decided to provide for his friends from the ill-gotten gains. He has endured torture and prison to protect his friends. He has been injected with a debilitating drug regularly. Later, it is curtly reported that Bilimoria died of a heart attack in prison. Gustad is the lone mourner at his funeral.

Ghulam Mohammed

The taxi driver rescued Gustad after his accident. Gustad and Dinshawji witnessed Ghulam's own collision with a hit-and-run car. Ghulam turns out to be an assistant to Bilimoria, who saved his life in combat in 1948. Ghulam's head is still bandaged from his accident, when he poses as a bookseller to rendezvous with Gustad at the bazaar and deliver Bilimoria's package. Ghulam can be reached at the House of Cages. He confirms that he and Bilimoria both work for RAW, but nothing more. Ghulam appears once more, bearing train tickets to Delhi, with a request from Bilimoria that Gustad not fail to come and learn the truth. Ghulam is more forceful the second time he delivers the request, visiting the Nobles' home and revealing that their mutual friend is doomed. Ghulam keeps his word never to bother the family again, but waits for Gustad outside the Tower of Silence after Bilimoria's funeral. As a non-Parsi, had not been allowed to attend. Posing again as a taxi driver, Ghulam reveals that he is still serving in RAW because that will best serve his purpose of finding out who is responsible for Bilimoria's death so he can do it. He finally admits responsibility for the little acts of terrorism at the Khodadad Building that Gustad had been accusing him of committing.

Dinshawji

Gustad's balding coworker at the bank and friend, who has recently been hospitalized and who still appears sickly as the novel begins. Dinshawji suffers intermittent halitosis,



which can serve as a barometer of his moods, since it is intensified by stress. An inveterate joker - some would call him a buffoon -- Dinshawji refers to his wife Alamai as his "Domestic Vulture." Dinshawji enjoys reciting poems and calls himself Kavi Kamaal, the Indian Tennyson. Colleagues also label him the "Casanova of Flora Fountain," because of the lewd comments he makes about women, beautiful Laurie Coutino in particular. Dinshawji cheerfully accepts the risk of helping Gustad put cash into a secret account, and then to remove it again. Along with escalating his sexual innuendoes towards Laurie, Dinshawji boasts about having become a secret agent. Laurie asks Gustad to intervene before she has to quit her job and explain her reason for quitting. Dinshawji accepts the reprimand and vows to change. His sense of humor vanishes. His physical strength quickly fails. Dinshawji accelerates the pace of closing out the illegal account and collapses. Gustad accompanies him to the hospital and watches his rapid decline during frequent visits. Dinshawji dies alone when Gustad goes to the Mount Mary shrine to pray for his recovery. Dinshawji's funeral is attended by a massive number of mourners, and appears to be sincerely missed by the cold Domestic Vulture. His sunken face smiles in death before he is consigned to the Tower of Silence.

Miss Kutpitia

The Nobles' well-to-do, busybody second-floor neighbor, in her 70's, Miss Kutpitia rarely leaves her apartment. She has gained a reputation among the children as a witch. Dilnavaz is perhaps her only friend, accepting her idiosyncrasies, which include dealing in black and white magic and divination. Miss Kutpitia declines an invitation to Gustad's celebration after taking a lizard's wriggling tail as an evil omen. The lady never married, but dedicated herself to helping her widowed brother raise her nephew, Farad. When they died in an accident, Miss Kutpitia sealed off their rooms as a shrine for 35 years. Miss Kutpitia advises Dilnavaz on how to extract the evil eye from Sohrab and Roshan. In setting up a cure, she leaves Tehmul alone in Farad's room to watch a flaming lizard's tail. Miss Kutpitia does not understand Tehmul's warnings of fire, so the two rooms are destroyed. The rest of her apartment is left untouched. The accident frees Miss Kutpitia's spirit. She becomes a joyous woman once again.

Tehmul-Lungraa

A childish, rapid-talking resident of Khodadad Building who adores Gustad, Tehmul spends his days in the compound. As a child, Tehmul broke his hip in a fall from the compound's solitary neem tree. At 30 he is still cared for by his older brother, a traveling salesman, often absent. Tehmul, cruelly nicknamed "Scrambled Eggs," loves to follow grown-ups, scratches constant in public, which sometimes turns to caressing himself, and speaks so rapidly no one can understand him. Gustad is one of the few who can decipher his speech and tolerate his presence. Tehmul used to collect rats for the municipal bounty paid, but residents will not provide him any, after learning he tortures the ones taken live. Tehmul regularly appears in the novel, assigned minor tasks, and drinking limejuice provided by Dilnavaz as a magical means of diverting evil spirits from her son Sohrab. Tehmul takes a liking to Roshan's bride doll, but is forbidden more than



a quick touch. One night, the prostitutes at the House of Cages refuse him their paid service for their services. In frustration, Tehmul steals Roshan's doll. He needs something to help him masturbate. Forbidden light from Tehmul's window during wartime blackout leads Gustad to discover Tehmul's filthy fetish. From pity, he allows Tehmul to keep the defiled toy.

Dilnavaz and Miss Kutpitia expose Tehmul to a lethal magical light. A few days later, while enjoying the excitement of a street fight outside the wall, Tehmul tries to catch a soaring brick, which crushes his skull. Before he expires, Tehmul is freed of his speech impediment and thanks Gustad. Gustad carries the corpse to his bed, lays the dolly beside him, and recites prayers over Tehmul's body. Then Gustad weeps for all the people he has loved and lost to death.

Malcolm Saldanha

Gustad's boyhood friend, who helped him save a few pieces of grandfather Noble's workmanship from the bailiffs. A fair-skinned Goan, Malcolm inherited his parents' talent for music, and wanted to become a professional musician. The Saldanhas performed whenever Gustad visited their home. On Sundays, after taking Gustad to Mass, Malcolm taught him all about beef at Crawford Market and proselytized him. They lose touch for decades, but reunite by chance in the market as Gustad buys special foods for ailing Roshan. Malcolm suggests they make a pilgrimage together to Mount Mary to pray for a cure. There, Malcolm guides Gustad through the rituals and they talk a while afterwards about the old days. Malcolm has traded music for a municipal paycheck. The friends next meet when Malcolm is assigned to lead the crew tasked with demolishing Khodadad Building's sacred wall. He is torn by religious conflict, but must obey orders. During the riot, Malcolm is struck with a dead rat, but is not permanently injured - although he intends to light a candle at Mount Mary against the plague.

The Sidewalk Artist

Never named, the sidewalk artist accepts Gustad's invitation to transform the 300-foot long 10-foot high black stonewall into a vision of the gods and holy people of all religions. Gustad happened upon him drawing on the sidewalks of Bombay for coins. The artist, who has always valued his freedom, accepts with some trepidation. He has a BA in comparative world religions as well as in art, and knows all the important figures, events, and places to include. He relates stories to Gustad whenever he pauses to examine the project. The wall becomes a place of pilgrimage and devotees leave flower, incense, and monetary offerings, which the artist must supervise. He makes enough money to buy stylish new clothes and switch from crayons to permanent oil paints. He builds a modest hut to live in on site. The municipality's irrevocable decision to tear down the wall to widen the street leaves the artist desolate. He revives, however, collects his belongings - minus the oil paints - and walks on to whatever will be next, thankful to Gustad for the opportunity of having created his great work.



Alamai

Dinshawji's wife, to whom he always refers as his "Domestic Vulture." Gustad finally meets her in the hospital, after Dinshawji's lonely death. Alamai is tall, thin, and humorless. She is cruel dealing with her childish, grown nephew Nusli, is haughty towards funeral workers, and is melodramatic at the funeral. Only at the end, when she stands straight and cries silent, sincere tears, does Gustad, who helps her through the ordeal, perceive she truly loved her husband, and begins to wonder what kind of life Alamai and Dinshawji might have shared together.

Soli Bamji

The local police inspector lives in Khodadad Building and drives a Landmaster. Tall, gaunt, ribald Bamji is chided as Sherlock. He is concerned about the wall being torn down by the municipality, and claims the department is undermanned to prevent people from urinating on the wall. Bamji does no more when demonstrators face off against municipal workers at the sacred painted wall. This earns Bamji Gustad's scorn. Bamji serves as a foil for introducing political topics.

Dustoorji Baria

A retired Parsi priest freely offers advice to visitors. He prescribes both the kind of dog Mr. Rabadi should purchase to replace Tiger and *trandarosti* prayers to recite for the animal's health. Baria provides additional incantations for his patron to use during a conflict with Gustad. Rabadi reveals to the artist that a framed photograph of Baria wept real tears. Rabadi suggests Baria be added to the pantheon on Khodadad Building's sacred wall. Others charge that Baria is a charlatan.

Madhiwalla Bonesetter

The unorthodox medical practitioner uses secret potions to heal broken bones. He tended Gustad's broken hip in 1962 following a traffic accident. Bonesetter guards the secret of his potions carefully, to prevent commercialization of cures he dispenses gratis. No one knows how he uses bare hands and right foot to realign broken bones. He seems to have X-ray eyes.

Cavasji

Gustad's second-floor neighbor, in his late 80's, perpetually stands in his window, registering to the heavens his displeasure at the running of the universe. Cavasji's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pastakia, fastens a fresh sprig of Gustad's medicinal mint leaves around Cavasji's neck every day to control his high blood pressure. In his youth he had



been known as Cavas Calingar because he had been round as a watermelon. Now he has grown thin as a prophet or soothsayer. His hair gleams like a halo.

Mother Claudiana

She is the principal of the St. Xavier convent school that Roshan attends.

Laurie Coutino

A beautiful, tidy typist newly hired at the bank where Gustad and Dinshawji work, Dinshawji is too openly lewd about her. When the prim Catholic girl learns that *lorri* is slang for penis, she is mortified and begs Gustad to force his friend to stop harassing her before she has to resign and explain everything to the manager. Even Gustad finds Laurie enticing.

Shri Lokhundi Lund

"Mister Iron Cock," the visitor to the House of Cages brothel reputedly determined to collect on its money-back guarantee. He wears out all the brothel's employees before the first prostitute takes him on again and brings him to a shrieking, moaning climax. His story is good for business.

Mr. Madon

Gustad's bank manager, a finicky, kind hearted, brusque, snuff sniffing man who guards the secret of his first name. Madon accommodates Gustad's requests for time off to follow his secret missions. Madon also offers Gustad a ride to Dinshawji's funeral.

Nusli

The milquetoast 20-year-old nephew that Dinshawji and Alamai raise as a son. Gustad takes him under his wing during his uncle's funeral to save him Nusli his fears and to separate him from his tormenting aunt.

Peerbhoy Paanwalla

The House of Cages' colorful pimp, who sits cross-legged like a guru, telling stories. Peerbhoy is a moving speaker. This helps him sell potions to cure any malady and particularly elixers to help customers make the most of visits to the House of Cages. Gustad remembers Peerbhoy telling these stories back when Gustad was a boy and his father brought him to the clinic next door. Peerbhoy agrees to be an intermediary between Gustad and RAW. Peerbhoy and Dr. Paymaster lead the quixotic march on the



municipal office. The march breaks down at the Khodadad Building's sacred wall, leading to the climactic street battle over the wall's destruction.

Mrs. Pastakia

Cavasji's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pastakia is a mother of five. She is an inquisitive, short-tempered, and manipulative sufferer of migraines. Gustad dislikes but tolerates her. Mrs. Pastakia's patient, high-minded husband does the housework after he gets home from his job.

Dr. Paymaster

The Nobles' longtime physician, Dr. Paymaster has matured from a blundering young physician to a grandfatherly practitioner who enjoys amusing patients with constant patter and buffoonery. He has grown outspoken about the war with Pakistan. Paymaster emerges as a general in the quixotic march for justice on the municipal building, but is quickly deflated when violence flares and he is called upon to examine a mortally wounded Tehmul.

Mr. Rabadi

Gustad's neighbor in the Khodadad Building, with whom Gustad has a long-time quarrel. Rabadi's dog Tiger, now deceased, had enjoyed relieving himself in Gustad's bushes. Now Rabadi complains that Darius is molesting his daughter, Jasmine. Rabadi, nicknamed the "idiotic dogwalla," falls under the mystical influence of Dustoorji Baria. Rabadi advocates Baria's inclusion on the sacred wall as a true miracle worker.

When Dilnavaz realizes Rabadi is the source of the evil eye afflicting Roshan, she follows Miss Kutpitia's recipe and pours the resulting liquid on Rabadi's head from the balcony above. He is briefly blinded and stalks off threatening prosecution for molestation and now assault. He recovers. So does Roshan.

Jasmine Rabadi

Darius' school friend, whose soft brown eyes melt him. Jasmine's father charges that Darius is molesting her, but in reality he is balancing her as she learns to ride a bicycle to lose weight.

Hydraulic Hema

A prostitute from the House of Cages tries to prevent the wrecking crew from demolishing the painted wall with its image of Yellamma (protector of prostitutes).



Objects/Places

House of Cages

A house of prostitution next door to the Noble family's physician's office, it becomes the intermediary location for contacts between Gustad and Bilimoria and the rallying point for a march on the municipality to demand improvements to the sewer system.

Khodadad Building

The compound of apartments in which the Nobles live, it lies north of Bombay. Khodadad Building is three stories high. Each floor holds ten apartments. It has five entrances. Stairways surround a courtyard and are separated from the street and an adjoining office building by a black wall.

Mount Mary

The Catholic shrine in Bandra is renowned for miraculous cures performed for adherents of all religions. The street artist first tells Gustad its story, then Malcolm Saldanha takes Gustad there to pray for Roshan, Sohrab, and Dinshawji. Its statue of the Virgin Mary holding the Infant Jesus had washed up on the shore. Mary had appeared to fishermen the previous night, when the fishermen were caught in a violent storm. Mary promised she would watch over them if they promised to build a church in her honor to hold the statue they would find. The fishermen had kept their promise. The shrine became a place of pilgrimage. The infant is said to shift arms, miraculously, once a year.

Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)

An agency of the Indian government recruits Major Bilimoria, ostensibly to aid Bengali refugees in East Pakistan. In fact, it is the private "dirty tricks" agency of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Tower of Silence

The sacred place in which dead Parsis are laid out and reduced to bones by flocks of vultures. Hindus demand the outmoded, unhygienic practice be outlawed and replaced by cremation.



Themes

Animals

Animals are prominent throughout *Such a Long Journey*. Sparrows cheer Gustad as he rises at dawn for prayer. Swarming, cawing crows signal unmistakably that he must undertake dangerous, illegal activities he wants to avoid, as do the skillfully decapitated rat and cat, whose carcasses the crows devour. Tropical fish, songbirds, and butterflies and moths entertain and educate Gustad's sons as collectibles. The chicken hovers between roles as pet and food, until the butcher's knife decides the question.

Cattle are significant and divide religious communities. Parsis and other religious minorities consume cattle, while Hindus worship them and long to deny non-vegetarians their legal rights. Lizard, mouse, and spider serve as ingredients in magical rituals.

Most prominently, vultures perform the sacred duty of stripping the flesh from deceased Parsis in the Tower of Silence. Only in the case of the vultures do animals come to the forefront for an extended period and become true symbols, as "vulturist" and modernist Parsis debate whether or not their ancient funereal rituals ought to be updated.

Religion

Parsi rituals permeate *Such a Long Journey*. The protagonist is consistent and sincere in observing daily rituals. Mistry hints that this sets Gustad apart from the body of his co-religionists. The community's insularity is brought out in the two funerals that are described. The Parsis are divided over whether or not to update some of their millennia-old practices. The schism is partly motivated by a modern revulsion at something as unpalatable as allowing vultures to consume their dead, partly in protest to the practice of excluding non-believers from communal gatherings (as mourners), and partly in defense against the Hindu majority's sensibilities.

Radical Hindus are shown demanding control of the officially secular Indian society. Beating minorities and looting occur at the most radical end of the spectrum. However examples of unrest occur in everyday life on crowded buses. Protestors urinate regularly on the Khodadad Building's black wall.

The sidewalk artist is a student of comparative religions. He embraces all the religious traditions of India in his artwork, and provides a few commentaries on notable deities and saints. Catholicism in the subcontinent is shown flourishing in its most ecumenical setting, the miracle-working Mount Mary shrine. Considerable detail is given on its running. Islam is depicted on the wall through famous mosques, since Islam forbids the depiction of personages. Islam is also depicted as being routinely disobeyed by the rulers of Muslim Pakistan.



Gustad accepts the possibility that the Christians can cure those close to him. Without abandoning his own faith, he learns the power of the prayers he recites without understanding them. Even so, Gustad experiences their mystical power over the body of a friend.

The wall's rich iconography and the rich parallelism of the two liturgical settings redeem religion from the divisive role it otherwise plays in human life.

Politics

Local, national, and international politics permeate *Such a Long Journey*, and receive no redemption. Municipal officials refuse to provide the services citizens expect and demand. The officials impose a ruling on the wall that the residents oppose. National figures, from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on down, are shown as being grasping, corrupt, incompetent, and savage. Only fire can fight fire.

Framed photographs of Mahatma Gandhi and the Panditi, Jawaharlal Nehru, hang over a rebel's desk. Even Nehru is shown to have been conspiring with the Chinese and to have been working to put his daughter into the prime minister's office after him. Gandhi's non-violence fails in the battle over the sacred wall.

The money laundering, which occupies much of the novel, is said to be required to fund the valiant Bangladeshi rebels. However, it is revealed to be a frustrated operative's attempt at getting a piece of the pie for his friends. The Nixon administration is humorously savaged for its support of Pakistan and is required by the rules of geopolitics to bunt Soviet overtures to the Indians.



Style

Point of View

Such a Long Journey is written in the third person as a narrative of current events. The narrator is privy to the characters' minds. Flashbacks to the protagonist's childhood are frequent. The characters' conversations are used to debate events then current in the Indian subcontinent. The independence of Bangladesh, the brief war between India and Pakistan, massacres of innocents, a face-off between the U.S. and Soviet fleets, and, above all, widespread assumptions that the government of Indira Gandhi is thoroughly corrupt and unstoppable are all addressed. Except as a forum for these political expositions, dialog plays a minor role in moving the story forward.

Setting

Such a Long Journey is set in and around Bombay, India in 1971-72. The author incorporates an historical event, Bangladesh's declaration of independence. The volatile political and military events that rocked the entire subcontinent during that era are not only discussed at length among the characters, but also drive one of the major story lines. The action is divided between the Khodadad apartment complex, north of the city, and the unnamed bank in which the protagonist works. Setting a few scenes in an open air meat market, a bazaar, a brothel, a Christian shrine, and prison hospital allows the author to broaden the slices of Indian life he portrays.

Language and Meaning

Such a Long Journey is written in flowing, expressive, contemporary English. Shifts into Indian patois are rare, compared with other novels sharing this setting. Most of these occur when characters are fired up about political events and speak with passion. Even then, the effect is muted. Only when relating the restaurant's various signs, does the author note the region's linguistic peculiarities. Mistry's intent is to tell about the little-known, secretive, minority community into which he was born. He uses the technical terms and religious texts of his Parsi religion without slowing to explain every detail. The meaning can usually be determined from the context, immediate or extended.

Structure

Such a Long Journey consists of 22 chapters, untitled and not divided into sections. The only story line that appears to resolve itself before the climax, a father and son conflict, actually haunts the background until it is brought to the front, very briefly, in the final pages. All other story lines - the fate of an ailing daughter; the idiosyncrasies of a worse-ailing friend; and the selfish, threatening demands of a former friend-develop in parallel,

fairly homogeneously, and serve as a matrix for interweaving art, religion, politics, war, superstition, and sex.



Quotes

"At each demise, Darius wept bitterly and buried his departed friends in the compound beside his father's vinca bush. He spent long hours meditating on the wisdom of loving living things which invariably ended up dead. There was something patently ungrateful about the transaction, a lack of good taste in whoever was responsible for such a pointless, wasteful finish: beautiful, colourful creatures, full of life and fun, hidden under the drab soil of the compound. What sense did it make?" Chapter 3, pg. 43.

"The voices ceased abruptly, in mid-melody. Their features frozen, everyone looked at Sohrab. He sat staring angrily at his plate. The candles cast nervous shadows that shivered or yawed wildly when the flames were disturbed by breathing. "'The food is getting really cold,' said Dilnavaz, although it was the last thing she cared about now. "'Yes, we will eat,' said Gustad, 'but,' to Sohrab, 'what is the matter suddenly?' "'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.'" Chapter 3, pg. 48.

"Now, as he wiped the nib and screwed on the bottle cap, he remembered that Daddy had showed him the holder-steel once, when the age of pencils was ending. With the age of ink came plans for the future. 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 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." Chapter 4, pp. 6-67.

"Mr. Madon's heart, however, was as kind as his habits were finicky. He was absurdly particular about the arrangement of things on his desk: the calendar, pen stand, paperweight, lamp, all had to be positioned just so. When old Bhimsen was low on funds, he would come to work early, unshaven, and displace things while dusting Mr. Madon's office. Then the manager would arrive, notice the misalignment, and ring for Bhimsen. Invariably, the perfunctory scolding was followed by a gift of fifty paise for a shave at the downstairs barber, which Bhimsen pocketed before proceeding to the bathroom where his razor was hidden." Chapter 7, pp. 95-96.

"Gustad continued wrapping the package as though nothing had happened. He could not pretend for long. 'Changed so completely, it's hard to recognize him.' The disquiet about the strange parcel, disappointment with Jimmy's unseemly request, now mixed with the other, deeper sorrow, of filial disrespect and ingratitude. The pernicious mixture filled his mouth with wormwood. 'Who would have thought he would turn out like this?' He pulled on the twine and it snapped. She patiently knotted the pieces together." Chapter 8, pp. 121-122.

"Then, the CIA plan is for America to support Pakistan. So India will lose the war, and Indira will lose the next election, because everyone will blame her only for the defeat. And that is exactly what America wants. They don't like her being friends with Russia,



you see. Makes Nixon shit, lying awake in bed and thinking about it. His house is white, but his pyjamas become brown every night." Chapter 10, pg. 145.

"What was left, he asked himself, after the very purpose he had struggled and worked and waited for all these years - after that 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? "And so it went all afternoon: from Sohrab to Roshan, then back to Jimmy, and Dilnavaz, and Laurie, and Dinshawji. Circles, U-turns, reverse circles, till he was dizzy with thought, exhausted from anxiety, and close to being broken by despair. "But at six o'clock he was saved by his anger." Chapter 12, pp. 178-179.

"The rooms he could peek into were sordid. Bed, thin lumpy mattress, no sheet, ceiling fan, chair, table. In on corner, a basin and small mirror. Where were the scented silk sheets, the air-conditioned rooms, drinks, refreshments? The luxuries that they talked of in their stories of this place? Where were the dancing-girls, the skilled practitioners of the art said to possess secrets that could drive a man insane with pleasure? The way these women moved and displayed themselves, there was as much chance of going insane with pleasure as recovering from heart surgery performed by a beef-carving Crawford Market *goaswalla*. He climbed the third and final floor. It's always the same. Always, things look wonderful from afar. When the moment arrives, only disappointment." Chapter 14, pg. 201.

"What is all this, Tehmul?' said Gustad reproachfully. 'What have you done here?' "GustadGustadGustadverysorryGustadpleaseGustad.' He stooped to pick up his empty cigarette tin. 'Somuchmoneyallgonegonegone. Moneyforrubbingfastfastfastfast. Nicenicefeelingallgone.' He looked forlornly inside the tin.

"Where did money come from, Tehmul?' "Ratratratdeadratmunicipalrat.' "Of course. 'He is OK now,' he told Ghulam. 'I'll take him home with me.' Tehmul began to gather his coins." Chapter 14, pg. 204.

"Malcolm was impressed by Gustad's account of the brilliant artist who had transformed the black stone wall. 'But come with me to Mount Mary,' he said. 'Ask Mother Mary for help. She will cure Roshan and your friend. Miracles are happening every day, I have personally witnessed so many.' He offered to help pick out a chicken first, and they started walking in that direction. Gustad learned more about the church, how it had a tradition of welcoming Parsis, Muslims, Hindus, regardless of caste or creed. Mother Mary helped everyone, She made no religious distinctions." Chapter 15, pg. 222.

"But what pudding was it that night? Lemon? No, it was pineapple. Or maybe caramel? Perhaps. Even memories do not stay intact for ever. Have to be careful, scrupulous, in dealing with them. And Dinshu is dead. Tomorrow, the vultures. Then, nothing. Except memories. His jokes. About the two men whose wives. And the other one, the bicycle pump. O give me a home where the nurses' hands roam...." Chapter 16, pg. 243.



"What an amazing contrast to the wall of old, he thought. Hard now to even imagine the horrid shit-and-piss hell it was. Dada Ormuzd, You are wonderful. Instead of flies and mosquitoes buzzing, a thousand colours dancing in sunlight. Instead of the stink, this glorious fragrance of paradise. Heaven on earth." Chapter 19, pg. 286.

"And the sweat from Grandpa's palms, soaking the handle of this hammer. To darken and burnish the wood. His hands first, and then my hands. Making the handle smoother and smoother. Sohrab should have ... but Darius will. He will add his gloss to the wood. "What did it mean when a hammer like this was passed from generation to generation? It mean something satisfying, fulfilling, at the deep centre of one's being. That was all. No need to wrestle further with the meaning of the words." Chapter 19, pg. 293.

"'Thank you.' Gustad sat in the front with him. Ghulam made a U-turn and waited by the gate for a break in the traffic. 'So you are driving a taxi again after nine years?' " 'Oh, that's normal when working in RAW. Sometimes bookseller, sometimes butcher; even gardener. Whatever is necessary to get the job done.' "Gustad heard and accepted the confession. 'But you are going to continue in RAW? After what they did to Jimmy? And they even tried to kill you, on your Lambretta.' "'You know about that? Of course, Bili Boy told you. Still, much safer for me to be inside Raw than outside.' He said softly, 'Bili Boy was a brother to me. When someone kills my brother, I get very upset. Someone will pay for it.' He nodded slowly. 'Yes, definitely. And by staying in Raw my chances are much better of collecting that payment.' His words were cold fingers tracing shivering lines down Gustad's spine. It was not empty talk." Chapter 21, pp. 322-323.

"Five times Yathu Ahu Varyo, and three times Ashem Vahoo. Over and over. Five and three, recited repeatedly, with his right hand covering Tehmul's head. Yatha Ahu Varyo and Ashem Vahoo, and the salt water of his eyes, as much for himself as for Tehmul. As much for Tehmul as for Jimmy. And for Dinshawji, for Pappa and Mamma, for Grandpa and Grandma, all who had had to wait for so long..." Chapter 22, pg. 337.



Topics for Discussion

How would you justify or explain Gustad's money laundering?

How would you justify or explain Bilimoria's money laundering?

How would you justify or explain Dilnavaz's spell on Temul?

How would you explain Dinshawji's coarse humor? What does it say about his marriage?

What does the blackout paper signify, both its staying up for decades and its coming down?

How do Parsi and Catholic practices compare and contrast in this novel?

How are the super powers portrayed in this novel?

What is Gustad's greatest psychological scar? How does it affect him?

Why is Dilnavaz portrayed so regularly as glum and combative?

What does the circling, frightened moth represent at the end of the novel?