CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

*When a culture vanishes, humanity is the loser.*

(Rohinton Mistry *Family Matters*)

Culture and Traditions are the product of the efforts of social group – a community over a long period of time. It is not time specific nor is it specific to an individual. It is like religious rituals, customs and ceremonies, language, beliefs, food, code of ethics etc. but it is rather a continuous process of consistent efforts within all its sub areas. Each of them has its worthy meaning and own significance in the flow of life. But are forms and literary creations in time, it does not emerge as a haphazard collection of artefacts activities. Culture is a whole system of life - a flow of the collective behaviour of an ethnic group or society undivided into sub areas. It is a specific behaviour executed by individuals who are connected to each other in a very organized way. The purpose of these individuals is to establish some norms for a smooth social life and to reduce the ambiguity and conflicts in their lives. They enhance the consistency and mutual faith among themselves through the richness of culture. In this way, they strengthen their social, communal and cultural bonds and create a firm foundation for social, economic religious and communal integration.

‘Culture’ and ‘Tradition’ plays a significant role in the development of an individual as well as the society.

Culture and Tradition are complementary to each other and collectively show the real picture of the civilization and the society. It influences every category of people in the society, and specially, appeals to the people with creative minds such as
writers, painters, and artists and so on. ‘Culture’ and ‘tradition’ plays a vital role in the literary creations of post colonial authors. It is a dominant feature in the writings of diasporic writers too. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines ‘Culture’ as “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively, the customs, institution and achievements of a particular nation, people, or group” (Jani 47) and ‘Tradition’ as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation”, or “the fact of being so passed” (Pearsall 396). The word culture originates from Latin ‘Cultura’ stemming from Colere, which means ‘to cultivate’. But ‘culture’ is one of the most complicated words in English language. This is due to its complex historical development in various European languages and prominently because it is used now as an important concept in various disciplines.

The roots of a diasporic writer are known through culture and tradition. So they try to explore their roots in the history of their respective race and native land. The authors of diaspora have a deep sense of belongingness to the place of their birth. If the reader wants to understand the literary works of a particular author in its correct perspective, it is essential for them to have the knowledge of culture, tradition and historical background of that writer. The reason being that the historical and cultural background of a person shapes her/his thinking and ideology to a great extent, and this gets reflected in her/his literary works. When the concept of culture emerged in the eighteenth century Europe, it stood for a process of agriculture or horticulture. It was in the nineteenth century, that the word, ‘culture’ was used to refer for first time for the betterment or refinement of the individual, especially, through education. Matthew Arnold’s concept of culture focuses upon ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’. In the preface of his famous work *Culture and Anarchy* he elaborated the terms culture. According to him, culture means ‘the best which has been said and thought in the world’ and emphasized that only refined activities can be included in culture. In
the twentieth century, culture as a concept covered all human phenomena which are not just the result of human genetics.

Edward Burnet Tylor, an Anthropologist attempted to define ‘culture’ comprehensively. He tried to touch every aspect of human life. He gave appropriate importance to knowledge gained by human beings as an ethnic group. He firmly believes that customs, beliefs, moral and ethical laws come under the umbrella of culture. Besides these fields, art and literature are also important components of culture. In other words, all capabilities and habit adopted by people of a particular society to lead a smooth and well managed life were included in culture. According to him, “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society” (Taylor 1). Raymond Williams, Welsh cultural theorist explained ‘culture’ as one of the two or three most complicated words in English language. Raymond has a firm faith that culture is not only for high category of people it is for the whole society. In his famous work, *Culture and Society* (1780-1950), he elaborated its meaning : “Culture meant a state or habit of the mind, or the body of intellectual and moral activities, it means now, also whole way of life” (Williams XVI-XVII).

Culture refers to the cumulative treasure of knowledge, experience, belief, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notion of time and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group of people for the betterment of individual as well as society. It is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another group or category of people. Culture is closely associated with the identity of people. It generally cover three basic areas of human
culture; firstly, it is the excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also called high culture; Secondly, an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depends upon the capability of symbolic thought and social learning; finally, the set of shared attitude, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization or group.

The Anthropologists believe that human culture is one of the basic requirements of human beings which distinguishes them from other animals. In broader terms, culture means: the sum of attitudes, customs and beliefs which shows self identity and integrated personality of people that distinguishes one group of people from another. The culture of a specific group and community reflects its, special features, as well as it categorizes the people into separate compartments of specific culture. It is transmitted through language, materialistic objects, rituals, institutions and art from one generation to the next. In other words, culture is a kind of journey a process of evolution. It is a matter of inward position of mind and spirit, not of an outward set of circumstances; it can be compared to the soul if we compare body to the civilization or society. Tradition is a complementary word of culture which presents the real image of the people of an ethnic or hegemonic group which passes on from one generation to the next. Culture and tradition articulate the attitudes, customs, and beliefs of a particular ethnic group or society. Culture and tradition mean the learnt and acquired behaviour of a group. People make their own culture directly or indirectly as Edward Said points out:

Just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitation, national language, and cultural geographies (Said 408).
The beliefs and conventions are changed everyday; new researches and inventions are exploring the new horizon of life, old myths and conventions are being broken and new principles are being established. There are many factors which are responsible for these changes such as: scientific advancement, globalization, expansion of information technology, transportation and so on. In the present scenario, old cultural and traditional values have been decaying due to the excess of materialism. In the present era, which is termed the post modern and post industrial society is also post-national. The present culture may be termed as global culture of consumerism which has debuted national cultures reducing them to the limited area and folklore. It creates an autonomous culture and society. When a culture is attached with a specific group of people then it means the people of the same group would follow the same way of life and it is deeply rooted in religion. It remains closely associated with religion and ethnicity. The culture of a particular group is known by the name of a specific religion, community, and country, such as; Parsi Culture, Muslim Culture, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism and so on. It is essential here, to understand ‘Ethnicity’ in its proper context because ethnicity is generally misattached with culture. Ethnicity means, belonging to a group of people that shares the same characteristics such as country of origin, geographical locations, culture and tradition, religion, ancestors and so on. It is a matter of biological and historical facts which cannot be changed with the culture in which a person grows up. Culture and tradition may change but ethnicity never changes. Culture of an ethnic group may be understood in the context of its historical and cultural background but it does not mean that the people of the same culture would share the same ethnicity.

The modern Anthropologist Dr. William A. Haviland in his book *Cultural Anthropology* points out, “Culture is a set of rules or standards that when acted upon
a member by the member of a society, produce behaviour that falls within a range of variance the member consider proper and acceptable” (Haviland 30). In the Indian context; the Vedic term for culture is Sanskriti which is originated from the word ‘Samskara’. The word Samskara in a linguistic sense implies the process of refinement and purification. So ‘Sanskriti’ means the collection of the methods which purify and uplift the human life, which teach us the art of living happily with others, the etiquettes of civilization and the ethics of social benevolence. It encompasses those values and practices which affect refinement and happy progress of the people and inculcate noble Samskaras in the behaviour and social conduct along with natural enlightenment.

The word tradition originates from the Latin word ‘traditionum’, which mean “handling over”, or “passing on” in other word tradition is a knowledge system or a means of transferring knowledge from one generation to next generation. Tradition works as a carriage of great knowledge and wisdom of ancient wise sages. These take the shape of customs that are to be followed. Traditions are generally perceived to be ancient and unalterable even if they may be much less ‘natural’. They may also be altered according to the necessity of time, situation, and circumstances, and these changes are accepted as a part of the ancient tradition. The term ‘Tradition’ can also consist of beliefs or customs taught by one generation to the next one often orally. Basically the term can be seen as information composed by consecutive generations from ancient time to present day but as a practice, custom, or story that is memorized and passed down from one generation to the next and it does not require a writing system. This term is used to recall long standing beliefs, practices or customs that have been handed down from one generation to the next till date. Every ethnic group of people, race or culture has its own traditions which reflect their rich heritage and
inheritance. There are some foremost qualities of Tradition: firstly, it involves some forms of ceremonial ritual or ritualistic behaviour; secondly, it involves a group of people which is collective and social in nature; thirdly, it creates emotions among people to preserve its true nature and it stirs emotions within an individual to bring about a greater sense of self awareness. These are the important aspects of traditions and these rituals are important to one’s identity and play the key role in the existence of culture.

It is important to understand the scope and importance of culture as it reflects the lives of people. The customs, beliefs, and rituals are practised by the people of every ethnicity, civilization and country. These are the symbols which support an individual to be a better and well cultured human being. If they have some social and cultural background only then they can understand themselves and their relation to society in a better way. It connects an individual to its ethnic group, society and culture. It is a sequence of rituals which gives it a greater value and power. Thus, the social traditions are part and parcel of culture as a whole. A culture is considered incomplete without this prominent component. Social traditions are an important part of culture and if anyone genuinely wants to understand the specific culture of a group of people, it is essential to have the knowledge of social traditions of those people. It would be easier to understand culture and tradition in relation to each other if we look at the culture of our previous generations as traditions of the next and this process being replaced. This explains the enrichment of culture. The meaning and purpose of culture has a vast range – it includes the origin and expansion of the philosophy, values, goals and modes of life in any group of people, society and nation. In other words, it can be stated that if society or civilization is assumed as a body then culture would be the soul of the society. It creates an environment for civilized, liberal and promising development of people. No doubt, it is an ensemble of ancient times and
has contributed to the overall refinement and upliftment of human beings. It reflects thoughts and systems of a group of people whose focus is to cultivate Samskara (noble virtues) among the people of the society. Therefore, cultural values and trends of a nation are the foundational stones of its development and strength. The culture of any race, ethnic group or society is its true power and possession which unfolds the wisdom, progress, and standard of living of the people.

Culture is a way of living, shared by a group of people which is to be learnt rather than a biological trait inherited from parents and based on symbol such as a cross, an image and object of worship and so on. Actually, it is an integration of economy, political system and social aspects of a society. It is neither the product of an individual’s efforts or the efforts of a particular phase of history but evolves through the ages. It is a long-lasting process from the very beginning of the world to the present moment. It is a collection of a number of valuable experiences, experiments and endeavors and efforts which are made for the betterment of society or nation. In other words, it is the soul of the group of people and structurally it works as backbone of any society or civilization. Social traditions, arts, festivals, rituals, the way of life and the moral and ethical values of community emerge on the foundation of their culture. Culture and tradition is so important for a society that any deviation in the flow of cultural values changes the structure of society or civilization. The supplanting of culture destroys the roots of any civilization because civilization is an external expression of culture. So, traditions, arts, literature, festivals, ethics of a society depict the external face of a society in its real form. In this way, culture and civilization are interlinked, intertwined and inseparable. The future of any society or nation thus depends upon the harmony between its culture and civilization. Thus, the importance of the culture of a group of people and nation may be analyzed and compared with the genes of one’s parents involved in the formation of one’s body.
How much important is culture and social traditions for a civil and peaceful society does not need to be proved.

II

It is true that most of the diasporic writers involve themselves into loss rather than gain. This loss is because of the creation of a new kind of culture resulting from crossing the boundaries. It is the uniqueness of diaspora that came into being after coming across the tension between the native and alien cultures, between native language and the adopted language and between their own nation, history and that of the one with a new historical perspective. These diasporas “displaced, alienated, exiled, excluded, and oppressed, create their own kind of epistemic disjunction at the heart of the metropolis” (Paranjape 7). ‘Writing from memory and imagination’ is chief characteristic of diasporic writing. But this process is as controversial as diaspora itself. The scattering or movement of people with a common origin, background and beliefs from one country to another may be termed as ‘diaspora’. It is defined as ‘the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel’. It is a Greek origin from ‘diaspeirein’, ‘dia’ meaning “across” and ‘speirein’ meaning “to sow or scatter seeds”. The term came into existence during the third century B.C. when the Jews were forced into exile from their homeland to Babylonia. It is referred to those communities who were either displaced or dislocated from their native land through various movements of immigration, migration or exile. Robin Cohen in the *Beginning Post colonialism* of John Mcleod has a point when he describes Diaspora as:

Communities of people living together in one country who acknowledge that “the old country” – a notion often buried deep in tradition, custom as folklore always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions (Mcleod 207).
The words of Cohen reflect the pangs of alienation of diasporic people. With the passage of time the term ‘Diaspora’ has broadened its range as “the exemplary communities of the transnational movement”, Khaching Tololian said that ‘the term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shows meanings with larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community’.

The concept of ‘diasporic consciousness’ in literature is not new. Lucian, a rhetorician of second century A.D., had reflected the feeling of diaspora in his famous work *Icaromenippus, An Aerial Expedition*. In the Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata are very pertinent examples showing the pains and suffering of the main characters. Now, the Indian Diaspora is generally referred to a person of Indian birth or ethnicity who lives abroad. Emmanuel S. Nelson defines Indian Diaspora as, “…historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian Sub-Continent” (Singh 37). When the Indian Diaspora is used in the field of literature, it is recognized as that part of literature which is written by people who recognize themselves as an Indian but live somewhere else outside India. These immigrants may settle in new places but they do not and cannot adjust themselves and feel alienated and nostalgic even in the voluntarily adopted land. They always feel a sense of loss and cannot accept the adopted land as their own land as such reference is quoted in the book *Contemporary Diasporic Literature* by Manjit Inder Singh when G.S. Sharatchandra the noted academician and novelist write in *Sari of the God*:

> though India is always on my mind, there’s no link that connects the sudden stop that my life came to there and my new self. I leaped from one life to another, and in between I left nothing but a vacuum. Only imagination and memory, when I need them, act as my bridges. Thus whenever I go back to India, I’m a stranger wandering almost invisibly in familiar neighbourhoods (Singh 37).
The word ‘home’ is an elixir of the identity and personality as a whole. Homi Bhabha termed such people ‘unhomed’ in his famous work *The Location of Culture*. Here ‘unhomed’ does not means to be homeless. The sense of being unhomed is reflected through the words of Salman Rushdie when he points out:

…that our physical alienation from India inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fiction not actually cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India of the mind (Rushdie 10).

All the immigrant Indian authors have to face this dilemma of being at distant places outside India when they live in their adopted dreamland and write about India in this situation they are alleged to be dishonest to their writings. Mistry asserts:

Some people might say it’s arrogant of me not to live there and assume that I know every thing…But I’m confident that I do know. It’s memory. Well I suppose that when one says memory, it’s memory plus imagination, which creates a new memory (Mistry 240).

This evidently supports the view that immigrant authors can write honestly about their homeland but the intellectuals and critics have different opinion about these. Childhood is a very important period in the life of an individual; the memories attached to childhood are not easy to forget as David Williams points out, “…it looms large within and without the text (William 61). A Diasporic Indian can represent real India but how can they have post-colonial view with reference to their motherland from such a distance. But sometimes this distance may prove beneficial to analyse the Indian situation objectively. Shashi Tharoor has a point:

Sometime it is true to say that one advantage of distance is that you can see the wood, and not just the trees. On the other hand, you would
probably appreciate the wood if you had a sense of what the trees are and that is where rootlessness is important (Tharoor 6).

Indian diaspora is one of the oldest and third largest diaspora in the world, next only to the British and the Chinese. While the writings of the old diaspora are absolutely marginalized, the new diaspora writers celebrate literally triumph all over the world. The new diaspora is in the category of privileged Non-Resident Indian status. Whenever we discuss new diaspora in terms of literature it should be kept in mind that they were not forced to leave the motherland, rather these writers have chosen to relocate themselves in the new land, chiefly for economic gains. This is the reason that almost all the diasporic writers justify their diaspora and their writing as Rushdie puts it, “Literature is self-validating” (Rushdie 14). They construct the motherland “as not an area of darkness, confusion, violence, but hopeless and doomed country which must be rejected” (Paranjape 11). Consequently the narrative of cultural diaspora is trapped in politics:

Diasporic representations of India can be harmful and misleading in at least two related ways. First, they might end up usurping the space which native self-representations are striving to find in the international literary market place. Secondly, they may contribute to a continuing “colonization” of the Indian psyche by pandering to Western market-tastes which prefer to see India in a negative light. Both these dangers arise not necessarily from a design on the part of the expatriates to “sell” India, though the latter possibility cannot be dismissed too easily. Rather, they are born out of the peculiar cultural politics of the diaspora (Paranjape 11).
This kind of cultural politics seems essential into days of globalization because the writings of South Asian diasporic writers certainly formed a good number in making Indian writing more visible to the world. Obviously the writers writing from Canada or U.S.A. and having agents and publishers abroad have to write their writings according to the taste of the international market. Shashi Deshpande noted Indian writer refused to accept the concept of ‘writing from memory’ when she remarked:

I recently heard the writer Ved Mehta say that exile meant a crystallizing of the memory of the earlier home, something that was invaluable to a writer. But I have a question: Does the memory get crystallized or fossilized? And how does one continue to write about a life and society without being an intrinsic part of its daily living, its dynamism (Deshpande 49).

The claim to reproduction of homelands through memory may be real but it is also true that the ‘real’ homeland that is reproduced is actually imaginary and unreal. However, all is true in postmodern capitalism. The created India in the minds of the diasporic writers is among the best sellers. They “create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (Mishra 10). The narrative of diaspora is a reproduction of ‘self’. It is an act of dispersal, a scattering, a flight and has to take root elsewhere and finally succeed to present a composite culture. All representations and reproductions of the homeland cannot be considered equally valid or invalid. Ethically and morally, literally evaluations should be different and emancipated from global cultural politics.

The term Indian Diaspora, especially when it is used in the context of Indo-Canadian writings creates confusion to some extent. The basic features of Diaspora such as forced exile, desires to return to their homeland as it is associated with the
Jews and the Armenians, the Africans and pre-independent Indian labourers is absent in this context. Indo-Canadian Diaspora is a pursuit to achieve new affluences that includes everyone in its range now days. If the term Diaspora is analyzed in its original context, then except for the forced migration the present Diaspora and conventional Diaspora are approximately the same. Diaspora and nostalgic desires are inseparable. But the critics question their homesickness when their close contact with India is limited to their occasional trips. When Rohinton Mistry who settled in Canada tells his position honestly about the practice of his culture and religion in his own words, “I’m not a practicing Parsi but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed [them] carefully in the same way as I did my homework, but it had no profound meaning for me” (Mistry 7). Thus the possibilities of childhood connections of such voluntarily migrated writers cannot be rooted in their birthplaces who are writing even now about Indian milieu. Viewed thus Indo-Canadian diaspora bears more dissimilarity than similarities but even then it cannot be accepted that they have no diasporic consciousness and nostalgia about their homeland.

III

The term “South Asian” refers to those Canadians who are either from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka or from Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, the Caribbean, Guyana, Great Britain, and European countries, who trace their origins to the Indian subcontinent. The two chief waves of immigrants from South-Asia first occurred during the British Raj and second after independence. It was during the late 1800s, the first South Asian in Canada came to British Columbia. In 1957, annual immigration quotas were set, allowing one hundred and fifty immigrants from India, hundred immigrants from Pakistan, and fifty immigrants from Ceylon. The South Asian literature is literally and artistically rich. The writers of South Asian diaspora have
contributed enormously to Canadian literature. M.G. Vassanji, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Neil Bissoondath, Uma Parameswaran and Bapsi Sidhwa, are the well-known writers of diaspora from South Asia and are contemporaries to Rohinton Mistry.


> [the Indian diaspora] is very important. . . .Once I went to the US, suddenly the Indian connection became very important: the sense of origins, trying to understand the roots of India that we had inside us” (Kanaganyakam 21).

Vassanji looks at the relations between the Indian community, the Native American and the colonial administration. Though, only a few of his characters do return to India. Vassanji is concerned with the effects of history and the interaction between personal and public histories. The colonial history of Kenya and Tanzania serves as the backdrop for his work, but it is the personal histories of the main characters that
drive the narrative. Vassanji’s presentation of the past is never cut and dried. In most of his writings the mysteries of the past remain unresolved.

In *The Gunny Sack*, Vassanji introduces characteristics themes of migration and dislocation, race relations and cultural synchronising, and the discovery of identity through communal history. Vassanji has called postcolonial writers myth makers and folk historians of collective consciousness. Using episodic prose reminiscent of oral narrative, he ushers a largely unrecorded past into fictional form in a book that has been called the first ‘Tanzan/Asian’ novel. Vassanji’s *No New Land*, set in Canada, is a portrayal of Indians from Tanzania living in Toronto. The novel employs a tragicomic mode of chronicle Nurdin Lalani’s struggle to adapt to Canada despite underemployment, new spiritual and gender norms, and a wrongful accusation of sexual assault. Political themes are treated with understatement and gentle irony. One passage in the novel summarizes the world view of Vassanji’s fiction: “we are but creatures of our origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds; the ghosts from our respective pasts stand not far behind and are easily shaken off” (Vassanji 9). *Uhuru Street* is a collection of loosely linked stories about Indian shop keeping families in Dar es Salaam:

While recreating the past through nostalgic reminiscences, the writer thus becomes folk-historian, myth-maker, and custodian of the collective history of their peoples. Vassanji states, ‘this reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing. Having reclaimed it, having given himself a history, he liberates himself to write about the present (Vassanji 63-67).

**Bharati Mukherjee**, one of the well-known immigrants Canadian writer-now-in the USA is a Bengali Indian, born on July 27, 1940 in Calcutta, India, to wealthy parents, Sudhir Lal and Bina Mukherjee. She married Clark Blaise, a Canadian writer.

The Tiger’s Daughter is a story about a young girl named Tara, who ventures back to India after many years of being away only to return to poverty and turmoil. She visits India after seven-year stay in the United States. The Tiger’s Daughter can be read as a nostalgic journey of the character as well as the writer, as Mukherjee to visit her native land with her husband in 1973. In Wife, the protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta – a young Bengali wife finds herself displaced and alienated in America. She finds herself unadjustable to the culture and the society of America. Jasmine is the story of Jyoti, an uneducated, simple but courageous Punjabi girl, who with no formal education arrived in America with neither money nor passport, to fulfil her dream. She changes her name to Jasmine, giving herself a new identity. The positive aspect of immigration is highlighted in the novel by Mukherjee. In her novels, Wife and Jasmine she provides a realistic account of the pressures faced by the Indian women in a male dominated North American society. In her earlier novels, the female protagonists find themselves uprooted, displaced, and living in despair. They develop nostalgic feeling and approach. Her protagonists are either Indians living abroad or Indians who return to their native land after staying abroad. Days and Night in Calcutta is an autobiographical collaboration with her husband, Blaise. Mukherjee revisited her homeland with her husband in 1973. Blaise, was delighted to see the richness of India in all aspects. He recorded the total experiences of his journey.
Mukherjee, on the contrary, sees the agonies, gossips, etc. of the people. She accepts herself as an immigrant and living in an immigrant continent. She describes herself as American and does not use the hyphenated Indian-American title:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I’m ashamed of my past, not because I’m betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here. . . I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a US citizen for me is that can define myself in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My affiliation with reader should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race (Alam 1).

Uma Parameswaran, born in 1941 in Madras, brought up in Nagpur and Jabalpur in India migrated to Canada in the 1960s. She is a scholar as well as a creative writer. She has three books of literary criticism to her credit, A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelist, Cyclical Hope Cyclical Pain, and The Perforated Sheet: Essays on Salman Rushdie’s Art. Uma Parameswaran’s themes are particularly the experiences of South Asian Indians in Canada. She depicts the struggle, pain, nostalgia and identity crisis of the Indian Immigrants in the new land. The motifs are highlighted either through culture, tradition or through heritage of her homeland. Roots but Green Are the Boulevard Trees, her play, was published in 1979 and was reprinted in The Door I Shut Behind Me (1990), and Trishanku (1988) is a sequence of poems. The chief quality of her writings includes the ability of blending modern experience with traditional myths and stories:
I see four phases in the personal histories of South Asian Canadians up to the 1980s, phases that also have a corresponding pattern in the collective context. The phases are: first, wonder and fear at the new world around oneself, and nostalgia for the world left behind; second, an overriding impulse to survive in the new environment which makes one immerse oneself in one’s career or family, and often precludes political or social participation in the larger society; third, after one has found job security, a turning towards organizational activity within one’s own ethnocentric community; and finally an active participation in the larger political and social arena (Parameswaran 8-9).

**Philip Michael Ondaatje** was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on September 12, 1943 to Enid Doris and Philip Marvyn Ondaatje. Michael Ondaatje is a poet, writer of long narrative works, a novelist, an editor, a photographer, a movie director, and a Professor. He has published eleven books of poems, four works of prose, five anthologies, articles of literary criticism, and a monograph on Leonard Cohen, and produced several films and screenplays.

Ondaatje’s novel *Running in the Family* (1982) is an autobiographical novel, as the Canadian goes back to Sri Lankan roots is an attempt to understand his Canadian present. Ondaatje sets out on “quests to discover places, people, histories, and persona which might provide a sense of belonging, strength, and psychic peace” (Leathy No.3). In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, he imagines various aspects of a largely unnamed history of Toronto and parts of Ontario in the 1920s and 1930s. The novel deals with the entrance into language, history and community. His next novel *The English Patient* won the Booker Prize and was transposed into a highly successful motion picture (directed by Anthony Minghella). It won nine Oscars in
1997 Academy Award. It does not have a Canadian setting, but has a Canadian character – the nurse Hana. Its setting is around and during the Second World War and ranging in locations from North Africa to Europe and from Canada to India. *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), *Rat Jelly* (1973), and *Elimination Dance* (1977), are Ondaatje’s first, second, and third collection of poems. *Claude Glass* (1979), *Tin Roof* (1982), and *Secular Love* (1984), are his fourth, fifth and sixth collection of poems. *The man with Seven toes* (1969), and *The Collected Woks of Billy the Kid* (1970), are his long narrative poems. Says Ondaatje:

> I am interested in myth. Making it, remaking it, exploding it. I don’t like poems or works that cash in on a clinch of history of personality. I don’t like pop westerns and pop Billy the kids. Myths are only a value to me when they are realistic as well as having other qualities of myth. Another thing that interests me about myth is how and when figures get caught in myths (Ondaatje 21).

In his book *Selling Illusions*, he explained that he did not want to be related to an Indian heritage of which he knew nothing or to his origin Trinidad which he left for good; he wants to be defined as a Canadian (Linteau 1-7).

Suniti Manohar Namjoshi, writer and poet was born on April 20, 1941 in Bombay (now Mumbai), in India, to Sarojini Naik Nimbalkar and Manohar Namjoshi. As a child she attended schools in Woodstock, and the Rishi Valley, India, and later attended universities in Poona, India; Missouri; and Montreal. She worked as a bureaucrat in India and as an academic at the University of Toronto. The poems in *Feminist Fables* (1981, 1990) use the canon against those who still try to control it, and in *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* (1993) she is concerned with ‘the individual’s desire to be good and the subsequent failure because it’s too hard’. Her interest in multi-media comes across in the poetry of Flesh and Paper (1986), which is accompanied by tabla and violin recordings, on her interactive poetry website, *Building Babel*, as well as in *Building Babel* (1996), a book that grapples with fragmentation and the reconstruction of culture and community. At press time she was working on anything at all Charity ever said, an attempt to deconstruct the glamour of power and to celebrate the value of charity.

IV

The use of mythology is something Indian writers in all the languages believe in. Myths are the entry points into a religion or culture used as a code or short-cut. If an Indian writer speaks of Sita or Krishna, s/he conveys multiple patterns of meanings to the readers who are familiar with the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagwad Gita*. Similarly, the Parsi writers use Zoroastrian mythology in abundance. Some of them used Parsi
myths with explanation, with the presumption that the book is going to be read by non-Parsi readers also. Bapsi Sidhwa can be put in this category. Like others, Rohinton Mistry used Parsi myths, as the reference points in the lives of the characters and somewhat succeeded to make Zoroastrianism as an intrinsic part of global culture/religion. Before analyzing Rohinton Mistry’s writings in-depth it is mandatory to peep into the roots of Parsi culture.

Keeping the view of culture and tradition in mind, if someone wishes to find out the cultural roots of any community; then it becomes essential to search its historical and cultural background. The Parsi community is an ethno-religious group of people, inhabiting on the western coast in Mumbai in India, Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan. Zoroastrianism, the religion of Parsis, is the major pre-Islamic religion of Iran. It survives in isolation in Iran but in India and other parts of the world the descendants of the Parsi immigrants who fled from Iran after the Muslim invasion are enjoying an elite status along with crucial challenges of survival and facing many problems and fears that come with it. The Parsi community has been migrated to different parts of world such as The United States, Canada, Britain, and other countries where they are trying to preserve their culture and tradition. The word “Parsi” is derived from ‘Pars’ or ‘Fars’ which was an ancient Persian province and presently located in Southern Iran and the word Parsi means the native of that place. The word Parsi implies the ethnicity, religion and native place of the people who are called Parsis. In Greek ‘Persepolis’ is used for ‘Pars’ and ‘Fars’ and it is believed that at one time their empire spread from Africa to China, the Danube in Europe to the plains of India. In the seventh century, Persia was invaded by Arab invaders and defeated the Persians who were forced into conversion to adopt Islam. The people with invincible soul who were not ready for conversion fled from Iran and sought
refuge in India. Thus, the term Parsism or Zoroastrianism in its right context is an
ethic term for the people who dispersed from Iran after the invasion of Arabs.
Zoroastrianism founded by Zarathustra, is in its original form monotheism. He
preached the sole, an absolute, omnipotent, eternal God called ‘Ahura Mazda’ who is
regarded both the creator and the judge on the day of the last judgment. It is believed
that he preached positive values and attitude towards life. The Parsi Zoroastrianism is
a monotheistic religion means that they follow the philosophy of a single God who
controls this world. It is a mistaken belief that Zoroastrianism believes in two Gods.
The Prophet believes that the whole world is dominated by two powers; Good and
Evil. According to him, “Spenta Mainyu” the power of light and good is the noble
spirits opposed by “Angra Mainyu” the evil spirits in the world. The principle of
goodness is represented as ‘Ohrmozd’ and the evil spirit is personified as Ahirman.
Life is presented as a classless struggle between the good and evil and the human
beings are free to choose between these two forces. The moral teachings of Parsi
Zoroastrians are “…Hvarshta (Good deeds), Hukta(Good words), and Humata(Good
thoughts)” (Kulke 18). The philosophy of Zoroastrianism is implied in the conflict
between good and evil until the latter is rooted out and it is assumed that after the end
of evil, there will be general resurrection and after that an endless era of universal
peace will be established forever in the world. The sect gives equal liberty to choose
their life as Mistry says, “…Zoroastrianism is about the opposition of good and evil.
For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice” (Mistry 7).

It is the personal responsibility of an individual to select the force of goodness.
Actually, it emphasizes a life of active benevolence as Luhrmann points out, “the
central cosmological struggle of good and evil is described as an effort to achieve
purity…, that which is impure is evil” (Luhrmann 101). No doubt, the core
philosophy of Zoroastrianism is based on the truth, noble deeds and positive thinking. It teaches truth more than anything else. They have a firm faith that truth is the greatest virtue. According to the great historian Herodotus; every youth in ancient Iran was taught horse riding, skill of archery and speaking truth. Their prayer ‘Ashem Vohu’ tells that truth is the key to all kinds of happiness. Their prayer, ‘Yatha Ahu Vairyo’ emphasizes the worth of charity. Zoroastrianism has a firm faith that he who has sympathy and compassion for the needy and, the poor acknowledges the kingdom of God. The maxim supports this view which is very famous in India and Iran. ‘Parsi, thy name is charity’. Parsi Zoroastrians focus upon purity inward as well as outward. So, they are expected to take a bath before any important ceremony. Zoroastrianism also focuses upon hard work and dignity of labour. The Gathas which is considered second to the prophet’s conversation with God highlights the important position of labour and hard work in life.

All the existing religious literature or scripture preached by Zarathushtra and his followers are collectively called Avesta. It consists of two parts – the Older Avesta and the later Avesta. The most important and famous part of the Avesta is the Gathas or Divine songs. The Avesta has been written in many languages. The Gathas are written in a pre – Avestan language while the later scriptures are written in the Avesta language and in the Pahlavi and Parhand languages. Only a fraction of the original scriptures are left today. It is noteworthy that the Zoroastrians still chant their prayers in the language in which the scripture are written. The Gathas are attributed to Zoroaster and these are written in various metres and in a dialect different from the Avesta except for seven chapters, mainly written in prose after the prophet’s death. All these texts are compiled in Yasna, which is an important part of the Avesta and chanted by the priests during different ceremonies. Visp-rat is a Yasna augmented by
additional innovations and offerings to the ratus (Lords) of the different classes of beings. The Videvadat or Vendidad has two introductory sections reflecting the process through which law was given to man in the eighteen sections of rules. Their important scripture, the Siroza reveals the deities presiding over the thirty days of the month. The Yashts are each dedicated to one of the twenty one deities such as Mithira and Anohita and so on. The Hadhoxt Nask explains the fate of the soul of the deceased. Besides these important religious books there is the Khurda, or small Avesta which is a compilation of minor texts.

Zoroastrians observe one day in each month and ten days of their calendar are fixed for remembering the dead. Besides, they believe that the soul hovers over the deceased body for three days after death. There are some clues, according to which they believe in the concept of Heaven or Hell. They have firm faith that their deeds are weighed and assessed after death. Religious places or places of worship have very important position in any religion. But the Greek Historians, Herodotus wrote that the Persian people had no specific places of worship or temples and if any were found-these are in the shape of terraces or towers or square rooms and are called Chahartaqs. These are situated in different parts of Iran. Now, they go to Fire Temples for worship but they are not the worshippers of fire. It is a symbol for them. The concept of fire is not new for Parsis; the Sasanian coins with an image of burning fire marked the permanent change in in the Sasanian regime. The Farnbag, Gushnasp and Burzen-Mihr fires were linked, respectively with the priests, the warriors and the farmers. The history of these sacred fires reveals that the Farnbag fires were originally in Khwaezm in the sixth century BC. According to tradition, Veshtaspa, the protector of Zoroaster, took it to Kabulistan; then Khasrow in the sixth century AD carried it to the ancient sanctuary of Kariyan in Fars. The Gushnasp situated at Siz
was the ancient fire of the Magi but it was recognized as the symbol of the monarchic and religious unity. The *Burzen-Mihr* Fire never ranked as high as the remaining two. Besides these individual designations, these fires may be further categorized into two categories: The *Aduran*, village fires, and the *Varahm*, Monarchic fires. With the classification of fires is also linked the hierarchical order the priesthood. The hierarchical order of the priests of Zoroastrianism is detailed as follows. The *Shrapt* is actually a religious teacher who was entrusted with the care of the fire. In modern time, *Herbarts* or *Ervad* appoints a priest of the lower degree to work as assistant priest. Next to him is the Mobed and on the top rank in this hierarchical order is Dasturzsho who works in more important temples. In this way, a well established institution of priests in hierarchical order is one of the special features of Parsi Zoroastrianism.

There are some ceremonies and rituals which enrich Parsi culture and tradition. All the Parsi children are included in the religion formally when they are in the age group of seven to eleven. According to the tradition it should be an odd number, so it is usually performed at the age of seven, nine or eleven. The name of this ceremony is *Navjote* which is an initiation of the child in the Parsi faith. After taking a bath which is the symbol of purification of body, all young Parsis receive *Sudra* or *Sadre*, a white muslin shirt in which a small pocket is kept in the centre of the front neck into which all good deeds and thoughts are stored. It recalls that one must perform good deeds. The white colour of the ‘*Sudra*’ symbolizes purity. On this occasion, s/he wears a sacred thread ‘*Kusti*’ which is tied three times around the waist while saying a prayer. It is tied three times to remember three basic principles of the faith- good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. It is made from sheep’s wool woven out of seventy two threads. These threads show the seventy two chapters of scripture, called ‘*Yasna*’ which also included ‘*Gathas*’. During the ceremony, the
child chants a few hymn from prayers, receives benedictions and declares his or her acceptance of the religion. He promises to keep his or her loyalty towards this religion and its glorification. He also declares the supremacy of Ahura Mazda in the world.

The penance is under taken to rectify sins and wrong deeds; the ‘Patet’ means the firm commitment not to do sin again or the confession of the sins or wrong deeds either to the chief priest Dastur and if he is not available then in the presence of any ordinary priest. The faith stresses upon purity. There are three kinds of purification: Padyab, ablution and baresum. It is a complicated ritual which is performed with the participation of a dog. It is believed that its gaze makes the evil spirits to fly away for many days. The most prominent ceremony in the religion is Yasna, essentially with the sacrifice of ‘haoma’ and observed before the sacred fire with the chanting of hymns from the Avesta. The sacred fire in the fire temple must be preserved continuously and has to be offered burning material at least five times a day. The foundation of new sacred fire involves a special ceremony. There are some rites for purification and regeneration of fire.

Marriage ceremony is one of the major ceremonies in human life in any society. It is the most important event between birth and death. In the Zoroastrianism, this ceremony starts three days before the actual ceremony of marriage. Before the ceremony, both male and female take their baths individually to purify their body and they sit down on their chair facing each other. A cloth as a screen is put between them and they hold their right hand in a clasp under the screen. It symbolizes that they will remain united in all circumstances and in every situation. The priest winds a thread seven times around the couple who are going to be married and confirms their nuptial bond. The belief behind this rite is to reinforce the idea of unity. When the screen is taken away the couple throws rice on each other. It is assumed that one who throws the rice first will be the dominating partner. During the ceremony, the couple is asked three times if they are willing to get married. Each of them has a witness and the
witnesses are also asked by the priest to confirm the agreement on this auspicious occasion. It is noteworthy, that the actual ceremony is performed in the night and also conducted in Sanskrit according to pledges given to King Jadav Rana who provided the shelter to the Parsis about fourteen hundred years ago at Sanjan (Gujarat) in India. Inter faith marriages are strictly prohibited in the Parsis and even now the social institutions like Bombay Parsi Panchayat looks after the social issues of the community. Inter-religion marriages are still considered a violation of the sanctity of religion.

The burial rites or the concept of ‘Towers of Silence’ is unique in the world. They use ‘Dakhma nashini’ which is the only method for the last funeral in their religion. When someone dies in Zoroastrians, after death a dog is brought before dead body; they give preference to a four eyed dog that has a spot on each eyes because it is believed that this feature enhances the efficacy of its look. The rite is performed five times a day. After the first one, the fire is brought where it burns for three days until the corpse is taken to the Tower of Silence. The corpse is taken to Tower of Silence and placed on a stone ‘Dakhma’ open to the sky and birds of prey such as the vultures. The vultures strip off the flesh of the bones and these bones dried by the Sun are put into the Central well. The fourth day morning is the most solemn occasion, it is believed that the soul of deceased reaches the next world and appears before the deity who has to pronounce judgment over it.

Along with these important ceremonies of faith, there are some festivals celebrated with great enthusiasm and worship is an essential part of these celebrations because the faith enjoins that man should keep his happiness. The Parsis celebrate Khordad Sal, the birth anniversary of Zoroaster. The major festivals in the Parsis year are the six seasonal festivals Gahambars. The Noruz is the most joyful festival which is celebrated in spring in honour of Rapithroin. The Mehargan festival of Mithra is
celebrated in autumn in the same way as Noruz. It is a well known fact that the ceremonies and ritual are the ornaments of any culture and tradition. These ceremonies are the real substance of any society. The Parsi Zoroastrians perform many such rituals and ceremonies. Every religion and sect has some common salient features and some peculiarities in its culture and tradition. But no one can say that religion in this world is unique because it may share a few characteristics of other religions as religions usually adopt some good deeds and thoughts of other good religions. The ultimate aim of a religion is to inspire the thoughts towards goodness for the benefit of humanity. Every religion or sect borrows some artefacts and symbols. The Parsi religion that once was the religion of powerful Iranian empire is also not completely indifferent to other religions. No reliable information about the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian religion is available now, but it has to be found indirectly on the basis of later documents and comparative study. It was closely related to the faith of the people of its neighbour in the northern parts of India - the Aryans and it is believed that the ancestors of both of the communities may be the same. There are many common elements. Both the religions possessed their sacred books - mainly the Avesta and the Vedas.

The impact of Israel on its Eastern neighbours may be observed easily. The Isaiah shows noticeable similarities with Guhas as observed by M. Smith. The Indus and the Parsis show the common process of rhetorical question and the belief that the same God has created the world and both the light as well as darkness are the essential aspects of the world. There are some common qualities or like mindedness that may be observed in the religion of Greek and Iran of that time. The Anaximan world picture connects to that of the Avesta. As the result of Alexander’s victory, the Iranian religion was merged with the Greek religion. The Parsis have a very rich cultural heritage. They had to face forced exile in the ancient times and even now they feel the pangs of diasporic consciousness. This ancient pre-Islamic religion of Iran had to face
a lot of suffering and upheavals from their dispersion because of Iran. They sought asylum in Sanjan but they could get only conditional shelter there. The King imposed some conditions upon them which were prominently related to marriage, language, and dresses which they had to accept even though unwillingly. They had to give up their language and adopt Guajarati language. This was a great setback for them because language has a very important role in the development of any culture. The post colonial critics accept that whether language has the power or power has the language is a strong dilemma in a diasporic situation. They have to lead a life of marginality but even then they marked firm determination to protect their age old culture and are struggling still for their cultural identity. The diasporic experience of Parsis may be understood as Stuart Hall asserts:

The diaspora experience…is defined not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of Identity…Diaspora identities are those, which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference (Hall 1990).

The language of the Parsis revived with the arrival of the middle Asian ruler. They got many important positions in administration because of their proficiency in Persian language. But even then majority of their people had to indulge in agricultural jobs to earn their livelihood. Their position and status has been revived during the British colonial period. They got elite status and important positions in the British rule due to their adaptive nature. They learnt English very soon and having the quality of honesty and hard work they won the faith of the rulers. The Parsis became very faithful to the ruling class and became very close to them. They became the favorites of the British due to their skills and entrepreneurship in various field such as ship building, textiles,
banking and other spheres of life as Nanavuty reveals, “…built battleship and frigates for Royal Navy, as well as merchant ships for the East India Company” (Nanavuty 86). In this way, with the arrival of the British their fortune revived. They started to follow their life style, manners, dress, music, literature, and food also. But it does not suggest that they did not feel patriotic towards their own birthplace or the country where they got shelter in their difficult times. Dadabhai Naoroji, Pheroze shaw Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha and K.F. Nariman were prominent leaders of freedom movement with a number of other Parsis such as Madame Cama who designed the first flag of freedom. Dadabhai Naoroji, Munchjee Bhownagree, and Shahpurji Saklatvala were the Parsis who got elected to the British Parliament. In the post independent period, Sam Manekshaw who was deputed the first and only Field Marshall in the history of Indian Army was a Parsi. Dr Homi Bhabha who got the position of first chairman of Indian Atomic Energy Commission was also a Parsi. Thus, Parsis played an important role not only in the pre independent India but post independent India also. The total population of Parsis in 1881 was more than one lakh which is gradually diminishing. In the census of 2001 the total population was sixty nine thousand six hundred and one which shows fall in their population. But it does not mean that they are becoming weak economically also. Their housing, education, and sartorial tastes are still up to the mark. It is the most westernized and urbanized community of India. Their male female ratio is also very optimistic and literacy rate is excellent comparatively. In the field of business and industry, they possessed larger share than their own such as Tata, Wadia and other business houses. However, they are on the margin being a minority religion of India and the scene of Indian politics is being dominated by vote bank politics. They are on the margin of social structure so far as their declining populace is concerned but even in twenty first century the life style and standard of living of this
community reflects its elite status. The most alarming fact about this elite community is its continuously diminishing population. The recent trends project that by the year 2020 the Parsis will be less than twenty five thousands. Late marriages, voluntary immigrations and ban on inter religion marriages are some of the prominent reasons for this trend of diminishing population.

Almost all the diasporic writers have strong links with their homelands and simultaneously an urge to assimilate and belong to their present place. The Parsi diaspora is also not an exception to it. It is the most dynamic and well received literature in Europe and North America. Interestingly quite a good number of English literary texts have been produced by Parsis such a Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa and Rohinton Mistry. In view of above mentioned historical and cultural background of Parsis in all these texts have Parsiness as the focus. Either it is the name of a person or a place, the marriage ceremonies, the Kusti, the celebration of Navjote, Behram roje, the narrative revolves around typical Parsi culture. It is symbolic of the romantic vision. The mythic response to life usually acknowledges, faith, religion, culture, and may even lead to mysticism and deep spirituality. This mystified spirituality sometime leads to isolation and is expressed through nostalgia or re-collection through memory and imagination.

**Bapsi Sidhwa** is one of the leading Pakistani diasporic Parsi authoress. She was born on August 11, 1938 in Karachi to India then and is situated in Pakistan now. She has four novels in her credit which reflect her personal experiences of the Indian subcontinent’s partition, status of women, immigration and life of Parsi community. She had to face many problems during her childhood because she was a deeply loved but lonely child in her family. As she told in an interview she got a great deal of affection and care as a child because she had Polio. She further told that she had to
undergo several operations and could not go to school. To an extent, this deprived her of the company of other children. This made her a lonely and introspective child given to fantasizing. She got her education at home till fifteen years old and received the degree of B.A. from Kinnaird College for women in Lahore. She got married at the age of nineteen and soon after she got the privilege to be a mother. She had to conceal her writing promises due to her family responsibilities but could not suppress her desire of literary career and started it at the age of twenty six. Once she visited the Karakoram mountain area of the Pakistan then she came across the tragic story of a young tribal girl who had been brought as a bride from the tribal area. As it happens in reality, after living there for some time she ran away from her husband’s house. The act was considered as social crime and dishonourable and she was hunted and murdered mercilessly. The story of that tribal girl haunted in Sidhwa’s mind and she developed it into the story of her first and second published novel. When the publishers rejected her first two novels, she decided to publish *The Crow Eater* in 1978 privately. The novel deals with the lively and human story of the Parsi community in Pakistan. Her second novel, *The Pakistani Bride* is totally different from her other novels. In this novel, there is no Parsi character and the novel revolves around the story of a young girl revealing the psychology of her feminine characters and sensibility. Her third novel *Cracking India* also published as *Ice Candy Man* in 1990. This novel was internationally acclaimed and made her the promising South Asian novelist. It is a description of the bloody partition through the eyes of eight years old Lenny that leads to the creation of independent Pakistan and India after the British quit the Indian sub continent. *An American Brat* (1994) her latest novel, deals with the inter community marriages among Parsis which is considered as one of the excessively sensitive issue in the Parsi community as well as in the whole South-
Indian continent. Like Bapsi Sidhwa, Rohinton Mistry is also a Parsi. Though, Rohinton Mistry was born and educated in Bombay in India, he is a major Canadian writer. Through his creativity, he has developed nostalgic mode of writing in all his major five works and tried to re-collect his memories and in the process re-locate the history of Parsi community.

V

Rohinton Mistry, a writer of Indian Diaspora, was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), on July 3, 1952 to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry. He completed his undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Economics at St. Xavier’s College, University of Bombay. At the age of twenty three he moved to Canada, where he settled in Toronto and started to work in a bank. He eventually joined the University of Toronto and studied English and Philosophy part time and completed his B.A. in 1984. He began to write short stories when he was a university student in Canada. In 1983, he wrote the story “Auspicious Occasion” which won the Hart House Literary Prize and then his story “One Sunday”, won the Annual Contributor’s Prize from the Canadian Fiction Magazine in 1985. In 1987, his collection of eleven linked short stories concerns the inhabitants of an apartment compound in Bombay was published by Penguin Canada under the title *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, and has reappeared under the new title, Swimming Lesson and other Stories from Firozsha Baag in Great Britain and the United States. It was short listed for Canada’s Governor-General’s Award. Besides, this book, Mistry has four more books to his credit: *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995), *Family Matters* (2002), and *The Scream* (2008).

*Tales from Firozsha Baag* is a collection of eleven short stories. The stories are based on the life of the inhabitants of an apartment complex in Bombay. One of
the stories, “Squatter”, consists of tales told by compound’s local story teller; one concerns Savukshaw, a heroic cricket player and the other concerns Sarosh, a Parsi who immigrates to Canada but comes back to India when he cannot adjust in Canada due to the use of a Western toilet; and “Swimming Lessons” and the story “Lend Me Your Light” have Canadian setting which reflects his understanding of his adopted land. The stories have dealt with the themes of boyhood initiations, of everyday frustrations and Parsi culture and tradition, their position and life in Bombay and thus present a realistic picture of Parsi community in Bombay. The book is his exploratory efforts to reveal the inmost truth of character which he achieves through the appropriate use of the stream of consciousness technique with flashback technique in time present and time past scheme, with the help of interior monologue and dialogue of characters. The stories highlight the decaying Parsi values and ethics. It is graphically shown how moral and ethical values among Parsis have been decaying or degrading day by day not only among the people of younger generation but even in the people of the mature generation. They do not have the faith in the teachings of Zoroastrianism that their ancestor had and religious rituals are dead customs for them now.

Misty’s first novel, Such a Long Journey, which was published in 1991, brought to him national and international fame. The book deals with the historical incidents such as: the partition of India, India-China war, failure of Nehru’s dream of Secular India, and Indo-Pak war in 1971 resulting in the creation of Bangladesh. The book is about the concerns of an ordinary man who gets involved in politics. The intermingling of religions is also depicted through day to day incidents of Bombay. He presented a real incident of Sohrab Nagarwala, the State Bank of India Cashier, who is at the centre of a huge financial scam which rocked the contemporary government led by late Smt. Indira Gandhi in this literary work. Along with the
historical events, the novel describes the inward voyage of the protagonist and chief characters. The novel shows the full landscape of the city of Bombay and explores the life of its people. The book focusses on poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, adulteration, exploitation, homelessness and cheap political stunts of a local political outfit in the city. The novel gives the impression of the identities getting detached from their original place. It reveals the beginning of detachment and dismemberment. The novelist presents the image of India from in its various aspects and modes, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the novel. The novel explores the root causes of the dispersal of Paris and disharmony in the lives of individuals. The novel was critically acclaimed and won many prizes in Canada.

Mistry’s subsequent novel, *A Fine Balance* has achieved the same level of recognition as his first novel, which is the more imaginative and praiseworthy book written by him. The book opens with the prologue dated 1973, highlighting the ‘dispersal’ state of main characters and it ends with an epilogue dated 1984. The socio-political conditions of the marginalized community living in the country are depicted graphically. The marginalization of Parsi community in India and the upper caste Hindu community’s behaviour towards the underdogs of the society are portrayed minutely in the novel. The displacement of Ishwar and Om within the country insinuates the politics of diaspora. As an Indian Parsi writer, he presents the realistic picture of India and its people. The novel also deals with the merciless aspects such as vasectomy displacement, mal-treatment of the weaker sections of society.

*Family Matters* and *The Scream* treat the universal human issues of care of aging and dying elders. Mistry’s perennial concern is with the moral teachings given in the Zoroastrianism. The novel also highlights the role of ‘family’ and ‘home’ in one’s life. The writer depicts the city where the narrative is set in minute details –
depicting in detail. The Bombay train system, arranged marriages, corruption, religious discrimination, food habits, political extremism and decaying family values in Metropolitan city like Bombay. *Family Matters* consists of twenty chapters followed by an epilogue, describing the story of a Parsi family. The novel unmasks the hollowness of family system and various changes taking place in relations in the fast moving world. The novel describes the decaying and falling health of the chief protagonist, Nariman Vakeel; the extinction of family values, a city named Bombay renamed Mumbai, and the change in people’s attitude and thinking. *The Scream* his latest novel is a penetrative and heart touching story of an old man who is now on the verge of the end of his life. He is not happy with his family members who do not give appropriate attention to him. He recalls his past and compares it with present which reflects his anger and anxiety. The novel has universal theme of caring for our elders.

Mistry uses once again the flashback technique, with time present and time past. Mistry lives in Canada, an alien land but refuses to give up his cultural roots, he hopes to fuse and assimilate himself in his voluntarily adopted country. Being an Indian Parsi writer he unravels the critical condition of the Parsi community in his literary works. He is eager to preserve the Parsi culture and tradition through his literature. He has a missionary zeal to preserve Parsism because he is aware of the fact that it is moving towards extinction and their identity, culture and tradition is on the verge of disappearance. He reveals his concern about the declining population of Parsis as:

> There are only 120,000 Parsis in the world. So it is not a threat or a delusion that they are on the verge of disappearance. What is 60,000 in a city (Bombay) of 12 millions? And it is a pity when anything disappears from this world, any species, man, animal or insect (Bharucha 43).
Mistry creates an environment of Parsi purism in his writing. All his main characters in his fictional world are Parsis. He migrated to Canada at the age of twenty three years even then he gives minute details of Parsi culture and tradition through the lives of his characters. He understands their psychological and nostalgic situation which is the main cause of his social and cultural conservatism. Mistry has remarked in his interview with Lambert Angela:

I am not a practicing Parsi but the ceremonies are quite beautiful. As a child I observed (them) in the same way as I did my home work, but it had no profound meaning for me Zoroastrianism is about the opposition of good and evil. For the triumph of good, we have to make a choice (Lambert 7).

There are various research scholars and acclaimed critics have been analysed different aspects of Misty’s literary works. Vinita D. Bhatnagar expressed her observation in her research article, “And Everything End Badly: A Reading of A Fine Balance” highlighted the problem of the dispossessed. She focussed on how artistically Mistry reveals the social concerns. Robert L. Ross in 1999, in his critical essay “Seeking and Maintaining Balance: Rohinton Mistry’s Fiction” investigated the role and importance of balance in his writings. Ross highlights the approach of balance in the literature of Mistry. He reveals that balance is the most worthy stratagem in the life of an individual. Jaydeep Singh Dodiya edited a well researched book The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry in 1999 in which he tried to analyse the various aspects of his writings. He delved into the psyche of the author through his writings. Dodiya oriented his research towards how Mistry’s writings reflect his personality and vision about life. Nilufer E. Bharucha in her book Rohinton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces published in 2003 tried to explore the dilemma of the diasporic author and his quest for ethnicity and his native culture. She made a sincere effort in theorising the Parsi Diaspora. She touched such points as ethnic enclosure, transnational spaces and multiculturalisms. She keenly observed the shifting paradigm
of society through his works one by one. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel in her scholarly essay, “Interrogating Multiculturalism: Double Diaspora, Nation and Re-Nation in Rohinton Mistry’s Canadian Tales” explored the cultural politics of Diaspora in his fiction. She has the firm opinion that the works of Mistry reflects double diasporic consciousness. She pointed out his commitment to the politics of diaspora which is derived from his own experience as an Indian immigrant in Canada but also from the status of Parsi ethnicity in India. In 2004, Anjali Gera Roy and Meena T Pillai edited the book *Rohinton Mistry: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. They analyzed the various aspects of his writings and in the same year Peter Morey published a critical book Rohinton Mistry and explored that how he tackled the issues related to corruption, community, and the sense of belongingness. Jagdish Batra an acclaimed critic of Rohinton Mistry wrote a critical book on his literary writings, *Rohinton Mistry Identity, Value and Other sociological Concerns* (2008) in which he touched the various thematic aspects with historical perspectives. He focussed on how Mistry handles the issues related to ethnicity - as an individual as well as in public life and how he practising those values even in troubled times.

The following chapters aim to take up the detailed analysis of the different works of Mistry. The study follows the chronology of production thereby looking at the growth of the writers in terms of the scale and depth of his portrayal. Parsi characters are the centre of his writings is an off-stated comment what needs to be studied is how far has Mistry gone in understanding his characters – their visible/invisible struggles and their efforts at a dignified survival in alien surroundings – social, political, religious and culture and traditions. An effort will be made to measure how far he has reached the deeper recesses of their minds. Has he found an element of commonality at a deeper level or are the differences unbridgable?
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