CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Literature, like any art form, engages the reader in a complex set of emotional, symbolic, moral, intellectual and social considerations, and it avails itself of a certain sensibility which we call the ‘aesthetic’. It explores the texture and meaning of human experience in a compelling way and captures the complexities of the human situation, illustrating dramatically the grounds and the meanings of values, and the nuances of our experiences. The author with heightened sensibilities and power of perception feels experiences and imagines intensely, richly, complexly and so could convey a richer, deeper sense of experience. He articulates values in a robust and symbolically resonant way, maintaining the power of the symbols and language of the culture in such a way that it supports the imaginative life and the expressive capacity, which are so basic to a culture’s good. According to Rebecca West, “Literature must be an analysis of experience and a synthesis of the findings into a unity”. (4229)

Literature represents and explores the way in which the world is viewed and experienced by people in that society or social group. It tells us a great deal about how the world is actually understood by the society to which the artist belongs, understood not only intellectually but symbolically and emotionally. With its imaginative and technical richness and its expressive power, literature is a very effective way of understanding a culture of a particular time, or a particular class or social or ethnic group. Thus it makes us understand how diverse times, cultures and classes are, and how they are the same.
Without this understanding of the range of human experience in its continuities and possibilities, we cannot make meaningful discriminations in this claustrophobic world.

This relation between literature and social experience can be used not only to understand the past and other cultures but to critique as well, that, we can analyze the cause and effect and can evaluate social changes, social values and so on. Literature portrays moral and other experiences in a concrete, immediately felt way through its aesthetic devices and powers; yet it allows us for reflection, for a reconsideration of the experiences evoked, and this is what might be called the moral effect of literature, as we can develop a sense of a self which is more capable of responding to the possibilities the world has for us and more able to deal with the limitations that society exhibits.

Thus literature represents a language or a people; culture and tradition. But literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. It introduces us to new worlds of experience. It mobilizes all our faculties of knowledge at once; not just our ability to analyze the outer world but our introspection and intuition as well. We can empathize with other’s feelings as we know what stirs our own hearts. When a writer imagines his characters’ inner drama, his description seems true to us because we have felt similar impulses or imagined analogous situations, and further can identify sympathetically with something beyond our kin; the knowledge of looking into the heart of things. And this is the knowledge that resides in our souls as well as in our minds that the great literature embodies. Thus ‘life’ is what literature is all about.
Literature is written in various traditions and genres that have customary patterns of representation and many thoughtful people have contributed to their evolution. According to Victor Hugo,

The drama is a mirror in which nature is reflected. But if this mirror be an ordinary mirror, a flat and polished surface, it will provide but a poor image of the objects, without relief-faithful, but colourless, it is well known that colour and light are lost in a simple reflection. The drama, therefore must be a focusing mirror, which instead of making weaker, collects and condenses the coloured rays, which will make of a gleam a light, of a light a flame.

Then only is the drama worthy of being counted an art. (xi)

This statement of Victor Hugo to describe drama will suit all the genres of literature, though everyone has a specific function.

For instance, poetry values the experiences of the eye and ear more than the experiences of the mind. Deep thinking may even have been irksome as many poets considered life as simple, composed more of action than of thought. Thus poetry deals with deeds, events and it calls for little mental effort from the hearers. To put it in a nutshell, poetry is meant for pleasure and the message is secondary, whereas prose is meant for intensive reading. Prose is read by everybody, learned and unlearned, by the scholar and the idler.
Drama, like other arts, is a representation of life in little chunks. In *A Background to the Study of English Literature*, Dryden defined a play as a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours and the changes of fortune to which it is subject for the delight and instruction of mankind. But all art is directly or indirectly coloured by the artist’s personality and drama does not promise to be entirely faithful to fact. According to him, it is a portrait, not a photograph, a version, not a reproduction; it is the dramatist’s ‘criticism of life’ and his verdict upon men and manner, and often suggests what is true by means of the false.

A great play is the product of imagination, working upon experience and observation whatever the theme may be.

The method may be romantic, lifting the language and the characters into the realm of poetry, or it may be realistic keeping close to prosaic... (qtd, in Prasad 76)

Great literature must exhibit the great possibilities and exertions of our human nature - strong passions and strong will, depth and breadth of experience. The novel, more than any other form of literature, is a picture of life as it is, a transcript of some chapter of human experience but it does not compromise on complexity, politics or readability. It is more formally defined as ‘a long narrative in prose detailing the actions of fictitious people’. Novels have at its best one great and splendid function: to strengthen our imaginative sympathies and insights and make us wiser and better. Meredith called it
‘a summary of actual life, including both the within and the without of us’ (46). It is nonetheless a very effective medium for the portrayal of human thoughts and actions combining in itself the creations of poetry with the details of history and the generalized experience of philosophy, in a manner unattempted by any previous effort of human genius. Every novel should necessarily portray a certain view of life and some of the problems of life; that is, it must so exhibit incidents, characters, passions, motives, as to reveal more or less distinctly the way in which the author looks out upon the world and his general attitude towards it. It is our conscious or unconscious agreement or disagreement with this view of life that often decides our preferences in fiction. And fiction often reaches a much larger and diverse audience than academic work and may therefore be more influential in shaping public knowledge and understanding of development issues.

Novel was a product of an intellectual milieu shaped by the great seventeenth century philosophers, Descartes and Locke, who insisted upon the importance of individual experience. They believed that reality could be discovered by the individual through the senses. Thus, the novel emphasized specific, observed details. It individualized its characters by locating them precisely in time and space. And its subjects reflected the popular eighteenth century concern with the social structures of everyday life. This includes things like the promises and perils of encounters between different peoples; the tragic mix of courage, desperation, humour, and deprivation characterizing the lives of the down-trodden.
The novel is often said to have emerged with the appearance of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). Both are picaresque stories. Since the eighteenth century and particularly since the Victorian period, the novel, replacing poetry and drama, has become the most popular of literary forms—perhaps because it more closely represents the lives of the majority of people. The novel became increasingly popular as its social scope expanded to include characters and stories about the middle and working classes. As a large percentage of women and servants enjoyed reading this literary form, the novel became the form, which most addressed the domestic and social concerns of these groups.

The novel has expanded in terms of its form since its evolution. Writers began to experiment with different modes of presentation. The role of the narrator was the center of experimentation. In a given novel, who talks to the reader? From whose point of view is the story told? Is the narrator identifiable with the author? Is the narrator a character in the story or another character who simply observes the actions of others in the story? Is the narrator reliable—can you believe him or her? Or is he or she unreliable, unable to convey the story without distortion? How does the device of the narrator ‘frame’ the story?

Nineteenth century novelists like Thackeray and Dickens often told their stories through an omniscient narrator, who is the centre of all the events and the motivations of all the characters of the novel. Through this technique the writer can reveal the thoughts of any character without explaining how this information is obtained.
in the early nineteenth century, the novel also enjoyed tremendous popularity in
the United States with the works of authors such as James Cooper. Around 1850, the
works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville propelled the American novel to its
full power. Later Mark Twain made the first linguistic break with British tradition using
forms and cadences of the American south in his works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. As these novels became very popular, many
fiction writers started following their own techniques.

As an illustration we can cite Henry James who began writing in the last quarter
of the nineteenth century and used point of view narration technique so completely that
the minds of his characters became the real basis of interest of the novel. In such works,
our knowledge of events and characters is itself limited by the limitations of this
character or central consciousness. Since Henry James’ time, many writers have
experimented with shifting the focus of the novel further inward to examine human
consciousness. Writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner used a
method of narration known as stream of consciousness, which attempts to reproduce the
flow of consciousness. Perceptions, thoughts, judgements, feelings, associations, and
memories are presented just as they occur, without being shaped into grammatical
sentences of logical sequences. In stream of consciousness narration, all narrators are to
some extent unreliable, which reflects the twentieth century’s preoccupation with the
relativity and the subjective nature of experience, of knowledge and of truth. Thus the
twentieth century novel was influenced by new social attitudes and psychological insights, and led the authors to pay closer attention to characters thought and motivation.

The outstanding literary talent that exists in many parts of the Commonwealth is making a significant contribution to contemporary writing in English, encouraging wider readership and greater literacy, thereby increasing appreciation of different cultures and building understanding between cultures. Yet the views presented by Commonwealth writers and the emotional responses of the characters portrayed are often bizarre to a foreigner. To understand something of a profoundly alien society requires a deeper shift in outlook than can be accomplished by an examination of an isolated text or even a collection of works. Commonwealth writers are native to the regions and cultures they write about: the Caribbean, India, China and parts of Africa. In some measure the readers must appreciate the exotic element of such writing: how different the fictional characters and their situations are from what is ordinary and important in our experience. To read postcolonial literature with insight, one must recognize that cultures are discrete and incommensurable.

The novel continues in its popularity to this day and is still the dominant form of literary expression. The novel is staying in the power because it has the ability to cover a wide range of tastes and interests. The line between literary writing and popular writing is at best a thin one. Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, in their time, were considered popular writers, but today they are studied as great classic novelists. Currently the novel is a varied form practiced with skill by a large number of novelists and widely read more
than any other literary form. It has moved away from a primarily realistic focus and has evolved into the expansive form that incorporates all other fictional modes. There are many types of novels today. There is the allegorical novel, which uses character, place and events to represent abstract ideas and to demonstrate some thesis. The science fiction novel relies on scientific or pseudo-scientific machinery to create a future society which parallels our own. The historical novel is concerned with the influence of societal institutions and of economic and social conditions on characters and events. These three types, the science fiction, social and historical novel, tend to be didactic, to instruct readers in the necessity for changing their morality, their lives and the institutions of society. The regional novel presents the influence of a particular locale on character and events. The detective novel is a combination of the picaresque and psychological novel in that it reveals both events and their motivation; the picaresque novel is something that relates the adventures of an eccentric or disreputable hero in episodic form. The first person’s narrative, epistolary novel, progresses in the form of letters, journals or diaries. Bildungsroman is a German form that indicates a novel of growth. This fictional autobiography is concerned with the development of the protagonist’s mind, spirit and character from childhood to adulthood. In a novel of incident, the narrative focuses on what the protagonist will do next and how the story will turn out. A novel of character focuses on the protagonist’s motives for what he or she does and he or she will turn out. A prose romance is a novel that is often set in the historical past with a plot that emphasizes adventure and an atmosphere that is removed from reality. The characters in a prose romance are sharply drawn as villains or heroes, masters or victims, while the protagonist is solitary and isolated from society. Realistic novel can be characterized by
its complex characters with mixed motives that are rooted in social class and operate according to a highly developed social structure. The characters in a realistic novel interact with other characters and undergo plausible and everyday experiences. According to Mirza Mohammadi Hadi Ruswa,

The most paying and interesting subject of study in this world is what happens to human beings, not only their external behaviour, but also their inner feelings and thoughts. These can be depicted through a novel provided on effort is made to present the picture truthfully....

(vii)

Fiction generally claims to represent reality. Art should give a truthful representation of the real world; it should therefore study contemporary life and manner by observing meticulously and analyzing carefully. It should do so dispassionately, impersonally, objectively what had been a widely used term for any faithful representation of nature now becomes associated with specific writers and is claimed as a slogan for a group or movement - ‘Realism’. Realistic criteria such as truth of observation and a depiction of common place events, characters and settings are almost universal in Victorian novel criticism.

Realism began in the nineteenth century as an experiment to make theatre more useful to society. The mainstream theatre from 1859 to 1900 was still bound up in
melodramas, spectacle plays and comic operas. But political events - including attempts to reform some political systems - led to some different ways of thinking. The European Revolutions of 1848, sometimes referred to in the German lands as the Springtime of Peoples or the Spring time of Nations, which focused on political upheavals represent a widespread emergence of situations across much of Europe, where populist aspirations, or human aspirations as less limited by traditions of respect for monarchical or religious authority, variously sought constitutional, liberal, nationalist or socialistic changes in society. But the working classes still had to fight for every increase in rights; unionization and strikes became the principal weapons workers would use after the 1860’s - but success came only from violence. In other words there seems to be rejection of Romantic idealism; Pragmatism reigned instead; common man seemed to feel that he needed to be recognized and people asserted themselves through action.

Realism came about partly as a response to these new social and artistic conditions. Three major developments helped lead to the emergence of realism. August Comte’s *Positivism*, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* and Karl Marx’s *Das Capital*, these three opened the door for a type of theatre that would be different from any that had come before. It was an age of faith in all knowledge which would derive from science and scientific objective methods which could solve all human problems. In the visual arts this spirit is most obvious in the widespread rejection of Romantic subjectivism and imagination in favour of realism—the accurate and apparently objective description of the ordinary, observable world.
Realism sets as a goal not imitating past artistic achievements but the truthful and accurate depiction of the models that nature and contemporary life offer to the artist. The artificiality of both Classicism and Romanticism in the art was unanimously rejected and the necessity to introduce contemporary art found strong support. New idea was that ordinary people and everyday activities are worthy subjects for art. Realists attempted to portray the lives, appearances, problems, customs and more of the middle and lower classes, of the unexceptional, the ordinary, the humble and the unadorned. They set themselves conscientiously to reproduce all to that point ignored aspects of contemporary life and society—its mental attitudes, physical settings and material conditions.

Realism’s most important influences have been on fiction and the theatre. The novel, which had been born out of the romance as a more or less fantastic narrative, settled into a realistic mode which is still dominant today. Aside from genre fiction such as fantasy and horror, the readers expect the ordinary novel today to be based on their own world, with recognizably familiar types of characters endowed with no supernatural powers, doing the sorts of things that ordinary people do everyday.

The main tenet of realism is that writers must not select fact in accord with preconceived aesthetic or ethical ideals but must set down their observations impartially and objectively concerned with the faithful representation of life which frequently lacks form. The realists tended to downplay plot in favour of character and to concentrate on middle class life and preoccupations avoiding larger, more dramatic issues. The realists are right in saying that the artist will do best to keep himself open to this change and not
tie himself up to the standards and methods of an age that is past; that he must have and
sue the freedom to express life as he really sees it, not as other people have seen it, or
have decided it ought to be seen. It is so true that the temper in which any really original
writer regards his theme will be the temper of his own time. The greatest writers do not
strive to throw themselves out of their own age. We take issue with realism when of the
outward facts of life, however faithful or vivid that representation or mere analysis of
common place motive and character, however true and subtle that analysis can ever make
great literature. Thus, literature must be faithful to the truth of life, and that its value will
be measured largely by the amount of such truth which it contains.

Dramatists have also contributed to realism. Alexandre Dumas, Emile Augier,
Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, to name a few, are some such writers of realism.
The works of the eighteenth century English novelists Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and
Tobias Smollett may also be called as realists and their works were representative, all-
inclusive and self-conscious.

Rohinton Mistry is considered to be one of the significant writers of South Asian
writers in English and in his writings realism could be seen with a capital ‘R’. His works
has a strong realistic base and reflects not only his personal values but also the changing
values of a society. His writings have a concern for human beings and human values.
His characters come alive as individuals, sensitive to their surroundings. His novels
reveal a deep understanding of the Indian situation and while recognizing the near
desperate condition of its masses persist in an almost idealistic belief in the human being.
In his novels, compassion is not to be understood only as emotion but as a more comprehensive quality. It is not even pity or sympathy or involvement in the ordinary sense. It becomes understanding of human nature which recognizes the law of change and growth; compassion includes the capacity to become involved at a human level.

Rohinton Mistry was born on 3rd July 1952 to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry. He was the middle son of three and he also has a younger sister. The playwright and short story writer Cyrus Mistry is his younger brother. His father worked in the field of advertising, while his mother was the home-maker. He went to two very good schools in Bombay - first to the Villa Theresa Primary School and then to the St.Xavier’s High school. He also did not live in a Parsi Baag, the housing estate in Bombay, but ‘had friends who inhabited these places and I had the opportunity to observe a little bit of it’. Mistry’s birth and upbringing in Bombay makes him an eminently suitable writer for witnessing the last bright sparks of the existence of the Parsis in India, as well as for documenting the criminalisation of the city of his birth in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

He married Freny Elavia in 1975 and immigrated to Canada in the same year, after obtaining an undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Economics, from the University of Bombay, in 1973. He took up a position as a clerk and accountant in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, where he stayed from 1975 to 1985. He worked his way up from being a clerk to being the supervisor of the customer-service department. The Mistrys’ lived in Brampton, a suburb of Toronto, for twenty years, where they had in
relation to Bombay, a materialistically comfortable existence. A very private and reticent man, Mistry, and his wife have led a quiet existence in Canada. This way of life has continued even after his novels had gained international recognition. Visits to Bombay have been few and far in-between and very private again.

In 1978 Mistry took up evening courses at the University of Toronto and studied English Literature and Philosophy and got a second Bachelor’s degree in 1982. While attending the University of Toronto he won two Hart House literary prizes and he was the first to win two of Hart house literary prizes. He also won the Canadian Fiction Magazine’s annual contributor’s prize for 1985. Two years later in 1987 he published his first book, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, a collection of eleven short stories, which marked the arrival of a prodigious talent. Also available as *Swimming Lessons and other stories from Firozsha Baag*, the collection contains eleven interrelated short stories that brings together some of Mistry’s earliest and finest writing. The tales detail the day to day lives of the residents of a decrepit apartment block in Bombay; Firozsha Baag, Mistry’s affectionate, thumb nail sketches bring together the lives of miserly Rustomji, the deranged Jaakaylee and Pesi, who is able to look up girls’ skirt with the aid of his torch.

Mistry’s first novel, *Such a Long Journey* was published in 1991, and won the Governor Generals’ Award, the Common Wealth Writers Prize for Best book, and the W.H.Smith /Books in Canada First Novel Award. It was short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize and for the Trillium Award. It has been translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Japanese, and it has been made into a film in the year 1998.
novel manages brilliantly to portray the Indian culture and family life, setting it against the backdrop of the subcontinent’s volatile postcolonial politics. The action takes place in 1971 in Bombay at the moment when war breaks out between India and Pakistan and this is the canvas upon which the troubled life of the protagonist of the novel Gustad Noble and family is played out. The microcosmic family dimension of the storyline is not only played upon a political background: quite the contrary, the story shows to which degree political and personal realities are intertwined and how much the microcosm echoes the macrocosm, since the lives of the characters are deeply affected by local corruption and the government inadequacy.

His second novel, *A Fine Balance* published in 1995, was selected for Oprah’s Book Club in November 2001. It won the 1995 Second Annual Giller prize and in 1996, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In this most solemn novel, the reader is again taken to India, during the mid seventies when Indira Gandhi had declared a state of internal emergency. The story revolves around the lives of four protagonists, each one different from the next. They find themselves thrown together in the same humble city apartment; Dinabhai, a widow who refuses to remarry and fights to earn a meager living as a seamstress; two tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash, uncle and nephew, who have come to the city in the hope of finding work, and a student, Maneck Kohlah, from a village situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. *A Fine Balance* is a mixture of the characters’ private lives with public history. The title is in fact an ideal state of being where a middle ground must be found between compassion and gullibility, kindness and weakness.
His latest novel, *Family Matters* was published in 2002 and it was as well received internationally as its predecessors and nominated once again for the Man Booker and it won the Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book prize. The book revolves around Nariman Vakeel, an oldman, a Parsi with Parkinson’s disease. Nariman’s memories of the past expose the readers to earlier moments in the city’s and the nation’s history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family. In *Family Matters* there is the familiar slippage between public and private worlds. It will be appropriate to quote Hudson to explicate this factor.

Every great writer, it has been well said, brings one absolutely new thing into the world - himself; and it is just because he puts this one new thing into what he writes that his work bears its own special hallmark, and has something about it which makes it unlike the work done by anyone else. (1-2)

Rohinton Mistry is a writer of the Indian Diaspora which has come into being for political and economic motives. Diasporic existence forces loneliness and a sense of exile on the individual often leading to a severe identity crisis. His books, thus far, portray diverse facets of Indian as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs, and religion. Many of his writings are markedly “Indo nostalgic” though he pointedly exposes the seedy and grim side of life also, not just the bright and cheery.
Indo-Nostalgic writing is a somewhat loosely defined term encompassing writings, in the English language, wherein nostalgia regarding the Indian subcontinent, typically regarding India, represent a dominant theme or strong undercurrent. The writings may be memoirs, or quasi-fictionalized memoirs, travelogues, or inspired in part by real-life experiences and in part by the writer's imagination. This would include both mass-distributed "Indo-Anglian" literature put out by major publishing houses and also much shorter articles (e.g. feature pieces in mainstream or literary magazines) or poetry, including material published initially or solely in webzines.

Certainly, Indo-Nostalgic writings have much overlap with post-colonial literature but are generally not about 'heavy' topics such as cultural identity, conflicted identities, multilingualism or rootlessness. The writings are often less self-conscious and more light-hearted, perhaps dealing with impressionistic memories of places, people, cuisines, Only-in-India situations, or simply vignettes of "the way things were". Of late, a few Indo-nostalgic writers are beginning to show signs of "long-distance nationalism", concomitant with the rise of nationalism within India against the backdrop of a booming economy.

Moreover, Mistry is also a Zoroastrian Parsi whose ancestors were exiled by the Islamic conquest of Iran putting him and his kind in diaspora in the Indian continent. During India’s colonized period, the Parsis were particular favourites of the British rulers. Both parties co-operated well together, and this entente has often been dubbed “the psychological diaspora” of the Parsis. After the partition of India in 1947, some Parsis found themselves facing “the line of discontent” between two warring regions. This situation provoked many departures to England and to America; marking the western
diaspora of the Parsis. Like other Parsi writers, Mistry's work is guided by this experience of double displacement. As a Parsi, Mistry finds himself at the Margins of Indian society, and hence his writing challenges and resists absorption by the Hindu-glorifying culture of India.

Living in diaspora means living in forced or voluntary exile and living in exile usually leads to severe identity confusion and problems of identification with and alienation from the old and new cultures and homelands. Therefore, we find most diasporic writing suffused with identitarian consciousness and the continuing problems of living in alien societies. The diasporic person is at home neither in the West nor in India and is thus ‘unhomed’ in the most essential sense of the term. However, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out in *The Location of Culture*, ‘to be unhomed is not to be homeless’ (46). When the realization of being unhomed first strikes one, the world shrinks and then it expands enormously. The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence.

The reality is that the immigrants experience a sense of uprootedness and unbelonging in the foreign countries. Inspite of the attempts of the immigrants of acculturation, they do remain at the periphery and are treated as ‘others’. The literature, product of such sensibility, foregrounds the life and experiences of this *Trishanku* community belonging to nowhere. This kind of literature presents the yearnings, anxieties, confusion and aspirations of diasporic people. Inspite of the yearnings, anxieties and aspirations, not all the diasporic men are inclined to return home, but at the
same time culture, customs, tradition, religions, and languages of their native lands remain and even become dearer to them. The writers, themselves, experiencing diasporic, are portraying different aspects of sensibilities and concerns, although these vary as per their generations; perceptions, attitudes and specific identities but the dominant factors are displacement, rootlessness, discrimination, marginalisation, identification, inter and cross-cultural conflicts faced by diaspora.

In the article, “Contemporary Diasporic Discourse”, Dr. Manjit Inder Singh has contributed detailed information about the complex situation of diaspora. He opines that, a new feature in diasporic imagination and human space is to find a new conversion to engage in an intellectual energy and to find a new territory or allegiance to replace a lost one and which would do away with difference and contradiction. The diasporic people also exhibit a keen desire to assimilate and belong to their present place of abode. It is a fact to remember that at some point of time the diaspora ceases to be a diaspora: it becomes part of the new nation. Traditional ways of belonging may be perceived as language, lifestyle and shared concerns. But that does not take care of the past which happens to be different in many ways and cannot be altered. Thus it needs to find a place in the new community, to be absorbed and be accepted for itself. Another aspect which deserves attention is the relationship of the individual to a community and the manner in which communities cohere through social rituals and practices. Communities often struggle to maintain an identity of their own ethnic practices and rites related to birth and burial. This aspect gets heightened in a diasporic community as it struggles to retain its distinctive features.
This creates counter-pulls in the psyche of the diasporics and is reflected in the literature they produce. But then diasporic writing is not necessarily a literature of resistance. It is nor interested in the category of the nation. It is more concerned in representation; how the self is represented, seen and remembered against the backdrop of the past. This then is the human aspect woven into the social context of the country of adoption, reflective of the cultural practices and environment of the community of origin.

Rohinton Mistry’s works raise a lot of other questions specifically related to the ‘homeland’ and political memory. Neither nostalgia nor memory in itself can account for this rootedness and preoccupation with the homeland and the environment precincts of the city of birth. It is also not merely the fact of being more at home or having a more intimate relationship with the space back there. It is more than all these, a projection of the individual character, a gesture of expanding the memory to include both the specific and the universal. For instance Mumbai comes to represent the author and the protagonists, the stability essential for the travelling self to feel secure. And even as the history of the colonial past is unfolded, the universality of the present in matters of human relationships, in matters of discrimination, construction of religion and racial boundaries, hatred, greed, aversion, love and value of family ties also unfurls. This is seen in novel after novel as the specific expands to embrace the outside world out there.

Rohinton Mistry’s texts focus on the Bombay Parsis who have over the centuries perfected the difficult art of being both global and local at once. Mistry’s first book was
a collection of short stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, which illustrated the Parsi knack of being ethnically conscious and yet of interest to the rest of the world. His first novel, *Such a Long Journey*, though focused on the Parsi protagonist Gustad Noble, was a book that included the socio-political reality of independent India during the troubled years when India fought two wars with Pakistan and one with China, to safeguard its borders. The socio-political concern became more pronounced in *A Fine Balance* as did Mistry’s belief that Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, was to be blamed for the condition of the Indian politics. This very dark book foregrounded the traumas suffered by the subaltern sections of Indian society, the Dalits and women during the internal emergency imposed on the country by Mrs. Gandhi in the mid-1970s. Here Parsi ethnicity collided violently with wider Indian spaces - a collision not always credible, as Mistry’s limitations as a Parsi and a diasporic prevented him from having a fuller understanding of the Dalit situation and the complex political forces at work during the Emergency period. Being a Parsi need not necessarily be a disqualification in areas of understanding the wider Indian reality and other Parsi writers, such as Keki Daruwala and Gieve Patel have achieved a synthesis between their Parsi and Indian selves. Mistry is also equally successful in writing about a group of people of whom he is a part of. Political understanding too need not be restricted to those who live in that political space, and in *A Fine Balance*, Mistry’s geographic and temporal distance from the emergency years are not pronounced and he portrays the accurate picture of emergency to the readers. *Family Matters*, while apparently centred round the aged Nariman Vakeel, is once again a text that is compassionate and wise in the ways of human emotions such as love, hate and guilt.
Mistry’s admiring readers are spread across a variety of age groups and nationalities. His wide ranging appeal could be attributed to the fact that he is interested in human beings and it is reflected in all his works.

This study proposes to explore the fictional works of Rohinton Mistry and to find out how he has dealt with various individual themes like Indian politics, Parsi life and Bombay, the recurrent setting of his novel, and analyse Rohinton Mistry’s unique style in presenting his ideas. The observations of various critics taken from e-sources on the major works of Rohinton Mistry have been summarized in the following few pages. Reading these observations provided a clearer insight to the researcher in carrying out her present study.

Most of the critics have expressed their views that *A Fine Balance* is incomparable among the other works of Rohinton Mistry. Mary Whipple(2005) opines that *Such a Long Journey* lacks the grand scale of a *A Fine Balance*. Priya Goshal views *Such a Long Journey* as a book touching and well written but didn’t have the powerful heart breaking ability or emotional resonance of *A Fine Balance*. Carolyn Pinkston(2005) sees *A Fine Balance* as a magnificent work of art but she grades *Such a Long Journey* as an average book as it is very slow moving and boring. Whereas Vishal (2004) felt that the language of *A Fine Balance* is sentimental and the characters and situations, a little too stereotyped but he feels that *Such a Long Journey* is a more honest novel and its message is more clear. E.M Otis (2003) found *A Fine Balance* as an intense journey and believed that none of Mistry’s works could have come close to it. According to him *Such a Long Journey* has failed to meet the high expectations of Mistry’s compelling and
totally engrossing story telling. Jack Thompson prefers Such a Long Journey for its nuanced subtle portraits of the family members to A Fine Balance as he thought it was trite, melodramatic and depressing. Tonia Gauer (2006) feels A Fine Balance is all encompassing and hence some what diluted whereas Such a Long Journey lives in a simple microcosm affected by outside events and as a result is richer. Huggins (2003) felt that in A Fine Balance Mistry has created vivid, wonderful and bizarre characters as Dickens but in Family Matters the characters seem one-dimensional and stilted. According to Chenoiz (2005) Such a Long Journey tops closely followed by A Fine Balance followed by Family Matters.

Such a Long Journey

Sohrab Dalmia, a Parsi reader (1998) felt that Mistry writes with an honest perspective neither hypercritical nor hyper adulatory; His sense of detail creates wonderfully layered characters; and his knowledge of the customs and even the idiosyncrasies of the Parsi community made him feel like they were in a private joke. Anoop Ujwal (1999) found Journey an interesting account of Parsis and Indian culture and everyday struggles of a common man in a society replete with traditions and superstitions.

Aninda Mitra (2000) saw Journey as superb story-telling, engrossing, intricate, humorous, and ironic and more, and takes one back to older, gentler days in Bombay-when the very character of Bombay began to change. A city-wide character defined primarily by the pioneering Parsi influence that played such an immense role in
Bombay’s growth and development. Mistry gives us some sense of these cataclysmic changes in values, outlooks- all in the microcosm of the khodadad.

According to Robert.C.Olsen (2001), Mistry uses his plotlines more as opportunities to describe modern Indian society, in its complexity and Noble’s passage through it. Mistry’s central characters are full, interesting and idiosyncratic. His minor characters- the politically active prostitutes, the apartment dwellers practicing the black arts, the bureaucrats and politicians, the simpleton are persons we have seen before. Excellent political satire sometimes veers toward cartoons. Still sentence by sentence, Mistry writes well and with sensitivity to his characters inner lives.

G.R.Rodgers (2001) opines that Mistry doesn’t go as far as that but he does give the impression of an India teeming with life, full of people invading each other’s space....

Shristi Desai (2002) feels that Mistry recreates the vibrant colours, energy and dynamism of India, part of the vastly populated subcontinent and introduces us to the sometimes incomprehensible cultural practices of their part of the world... .The father, son reconciliation shows there will always be familial differences and rough decisions to make but love between parent and child will persist.

Sonai Chokshi (2004) declares honestly that this book leaves one with a kind of tugging at the end or (as Mistry himself narrates through a character in this book) with:
“....A kind of sadness, that the book finishing too soon, without telling him. everything he wanted to know,

Carolyn Pinkston (2005) observes that Such a Long Journey is okay but very slow moving and downright boring in some spots and that it is her least favourite of the three books by this author. It is hard to believe that someone can write a book like Balance which was magnificent and one of the best books that she has ever read and then turn out stuff that is, at best, average.

Vikas (2006) opines that the author is quite talented, weaves a supreme blend of story telling and intricate web of understanding. Paints the period quite well. He deserved the Booker for his writings. He is still underappreciated and is relatively unknown... Rohinton Mistry is a great author and should be given his due.

A Fine Balance

Lesley West (2002) feels that this enduring story should make us think about the great failure of progress no one can stop it, slow it down, but it will always be captured by the ambitious politicians on capitalists who will understand it, justifies their violence and it can bring them hefty benefits and profits, even if they to break and throw away many eggs to make this progressive omelette. It is a haunting novel that has the total right to possess us into the most drastic and dark vision of humanity and its road to a better society.
Cloyce Smith (2003) felt a little nervous about reading this book. Having been completely ignorant of Indian history, “I felt that it wouldn’t click with me”. Mistry writes with such eloquence and beauty... very intelligent without being condescending.

Mohatarma (2003) says that this novel made him get on his knees and thank the God Lord for each blessing we have in America, and he highly recommends this book.

Prasad Iyer (2004) feels that the ending was a little sad but left him with hope. He says; people are so different —without giving the story away, it made me realize that even in the face of the hardest trials of life, some still bounce back and carry on with what they can, whereas for others, the reality is too harsh and they cannot face upto it...

Shasank (2005) opines that one could measure it with an American Yardstick...But it made Mm sick to think about people being treated the way Mistry depicted it. And therein lies the genius... The writing is so vivid one can see, hear, feel, taste. And every small moment of it and it will tear us apart.

Karen Potts (2006) felt that throughout the book, the relationship between the characters grows and the reader learns about everyday life in India and the terrible cruelties foisted on the people by the government. This is an eye opening, life changing book which will remain in the reader’s mind long ago after the last page is read.
Some of the critics have also given negative feedbacks like Prasad (2006) feels that the book could have tried to answer some of the issues it raises, but in the end it simply focuses on describing the minute of each character's daily existence and magnifying the (apparent) hopelessness of living....

**Family Matters:**

Eric Anderson (2002) finds the book making powerful statements about living in postcolonial India where the shadow of English culture still weighs over life. Yezad witnesses his son falling under the same amorous spell he submitted to as a child reading heroic novels about England that only exists as an idea of England. Family life according to Mistry is not a happy matter, but it is enlightening, complex, rewarding and surprisingly rich.

Going through the views of others has strengthened some of the already formed views of the researcher and at the same time it enabled her to explore Rohinton Mistry’s works, from different perspectives. Hence the researcher hopes that the humble attempt on her part will be an original contribution in the study of Mistry.

Theme is one of the important elements in literature. It is the underlying idea expressed in a literary work, a theme may be stated, but it is implied. Like other literary devices, theme has its function. Thematic designing is the distribution of recurrent thematic concepts and moralistic motives among the various incidents and frames of a story. In a skillfully crafted tale, themes may be arranged so as to emphasize the unifying argument or salient idea which disparate events and disparate frames have in common.
Laurence Perrine in *Story and Structure* says that, “the theme of a piece of function is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the unifying generalization about life stayed or implied in the story” (117). An author may reveal the theme by showing in what way a character has changed and what he has learnt (Perrine, 1970). Also in the same book, Perrine explains that a story is usually a portrayal of a specific situation in life which tells about human nature or human relationships in general. An author picks out one human experience to be revealed in his literary work and the idea chosen becomes the theme of the story (115).

A theme in fiction is designed to give meaning to a literary work. Stories usually have theme or purpose, no matter in what way the author presents it. Sometimes a literary work may not have any theme, such as horror stories, murder and mystery. They may be simply to scare. Theme is also important to give purpose to a literary work. An author writes a story because he has a purpose to convey a general truth about life or to introduce new concepts of life to his readers. Implying his purposes in the theme, an author can concentrate on the purpose of building up and expanding the plot.

Like Edgar V. Roberts states in his book, *Writing Themes about Literature*, “a theme is a brief mind full on any particular subject: that is, it presents and considers the subject in several of its aspects”. (4)
Themes are often interpreted in diverse ways by different people or critics, regardless of whether or not the theme discussed was the original intention of the author. The same story can also be given very different themes in the hands of different authors. Theme should not be confused with a moral, as a theme is not a lesson learned, but a theme is what the work says about the topic of the literature. The theme must apply not only to the characters in a particular work but also apply to humans universally. It is a comment on the human condition. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams opines:

Theme is sometimes used interchangeably with “motif,” but the term is more usefully applied to a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to involve and make persuasive to the reader. Some critics have claimed that all nontrivial works of literature, including lyric poems, involve an implicit theme which is embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery. (178)

In Rohinton Mistry’s works we could distinguish numerous themes, minor as well as major, prevalent throughout. For effective analysis, the thesis is structurized into five chapters, corresponding to various aspects of one theme that is diasporic reference.

In the first chapter, the purpose of literature and the different genres of literature with special reference to Novels, a brief description of Diaspora and Realism, and a brief
introduction to Mistry and his three novels are presented. This chapter also presents the conceptual frame work and a brief glance into earlier criticism.

The second chapter is dedicated to one of the major themes of Mistry’s works, Politics. The chapter discusses in detail Mistry’s preoccupation with Politics and its effect on common man and how he fictionalises certain happenings in the history of Indian Politics in his novels.

One of the main concerns of this thesis is to see how far Mistry, a Parsi himself, has reflected on Religion, especially Zoroastrianism, in his works. In chapter Three an attempt has been made to assess how far the religious and the social themes are replicated in his works.

Mistry, bom and brought up in Bombay, not Mumbai, is obsessed with the city. Eventhough he emigrated to Canada in 1975, all his works attest his nostalgia towards Bombay. The Fourth chapter is reserved to examine the authors’ genuine picturization of ‘the city by the sea’, and how he brings forth the ins and outs, the gorgeous and the pathetic faces of Bombay in his works.

The final chapter is the summing up of the preceding chapters where the themes, technique and philosophy of Mistry have been discussed. He is a writer who could look at
life from various angles and various points of view. His life and observation of life at close quarters have given him the ability to have a very broad perspective.

The documentation is done following the guidelines given by Joseph Gibaldi in the seventh edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 