Chapter-VII
Conclusion

Life is a journey and it is all about journeys. We move or we don’t, we do something or we don’t, we sleep or we don’t, but we cannot stop the wheel of life which goes on. Whether it is individual or collective family, religion or atheism, truth or untruth, diaspora or psychoanalysis it cannot survive in a vacuum. All need the fertile land of society to grow and evolve. Rohinton Mistry in an interview with Ali Lakhani commented, “life itself is . . . a journey without destination.” Perhaps Robert Frost too intones the same when he writes:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep. (Lathem, lines13-16, 224-225)

However, Mistry in his texts tries to collect this journey of life in the shadow of happy family and happy home. He himself accepts that his works, “are not much researched in the formal sense of the word- Newspapers, magazine, chats with visitors from India- these are things I rely on.” However, at the same time he also adds, “without memory and imagination” it is worthless. (Interview with Gokhle)

The yearning of Parsis for an extended happy home and family began with Zarathustra. He left his home in search of Ahura Mazda [God], who is the supreme power to bless us with ‘happy home and family’. However, the seeds of search sown by Zarathustra sprouted and flourished in the rule of the then king Vistap of Iran. But
unfortunately this home was conquered first by King Alexander and subsequently by the Arabs. Since then Iran remained a much longed for place for the Parsis. It is imprinted in their deep unconscious psyche.

If we make discourse analysis of Rohinton Mistry’s texts we would find that he makes ethical decisions in this intricate and unruly world. His texts always seem to propound that every individual is born to play several roles in this world. Everyone is seriously responsible to make this planet a happy home and all the past, existing and future people are a part of an extended family. Everyone should promote love and harmony. Every individual should try to be an asset to the society. They should act as a part of the larger chain. And above all we should be sensitive and serve as many people as we can, especially the marginalised.

However, if we study Rohinton Mistry’s texts thoroughly the following questions arise in our mind: What has Mistry achieved in his literary journey that began with *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, thirty two years ago and culminated with *Family Matters*? Have his texts grown in ideology or remained ingrained in the psyche only? Have his texts transcended the personal family, home and male chauvinism? Has the Parsi tradition evolved or become more rooted to social dogma? Do history and politics dealt in his texts transcend the age or remain confined to the specific span of time? Does Mistry celebrate his migration or remain emotionally attached to India like several other diasporic writers?

Mistry’s short story collection was a serious attempt to explore and establish the roots of Parsi tradition. In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* there are stories like, “Auspicious Occasion”, “Exercisers”, Condolence Visit”, “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag”, among these stories Mistry is deeply concerned about Parsi life and tradition
in Postcolonial India. In these stories Mistry points out the Parsi tradition like *Chasni*, *Behram Raje, Parsi Marriages, Dokhma* or *The Tower of Silence, Kusti, Sudra, Funeral rites, Gomez*, etc. Indeed, in most of his texts the elder characters strictly adhere to Parsi tradition while the younger generation remains lackadaisical towards rituals of tradition. Chasni (Mehroo’s children), wearing Sudra (Kersi in *Swimming Lesson*), to put off the candle after four days of the deceased and donating the clothes belonging to the deceased that should be preserved for a whole year (Doulat Mirza in *Condolence Visit*). But one thing is very important to note that the same younger people who do not take interest in the Parsi rituals become stubborn and orthodox when they become old. Parsis regard themselves as a “pure race”, so inter-caste marriages are strictly prohibited in the community. But the younger generation do not pay heed to this tradition. For example Nariman falls in love with a Christian girl. Murad falls in love with a Hindu girl. This prohibition also becomes a cause of emotional gap between the elder and younger. However, somewhere this inter-caste wedding restriction is shackling the growth of Parsi population and dragging them towards their extinction. Parsi rituals are highly influenced by Hindu rituals. Gradually the social dogma in Parsis is increasing (Jashna in “The Ghost of Firozsha Baag”, visiting the Hind Bhagwan Baba in “Exercisers” by a Parsi family, Miss Kutputia in *Such a Long Journey*). However, the Parsis enjoy Parsi food like *Dhansak, Dhandarpatyo*. Traditionally Parsis respect cow and avoid eating beef but in Postcolonial India most of them prefer to eat beef. As per the contract with king Jadhav Rana, they used to wear ‘Pagree’ and women wear traditional Hindu costume but under the British influence they also broke themselves from the oath given to the King.
In *Such a Long Journey*, we have Parsi characters but they are not fanatic towards rituals i.e. Almai, Dinshawji’s wife does not prefer the deceased body of Dishawji to be washed with gomez (urine of cow), instead she says, “‘All this nonsense with bull’s urine is not for us,’ … ‘We are modern people. Use water only, nothing else.’” (SALJ, 246) And in *Family Matters*, Yezad becomes a fanatic follower of rituals. Hence we can say that the Parsi community and their traditions as a whole are passing through a transition period.

Mistry’s home and family is not only restricted to Parsi community and Iran. His works delineate India as an extended family and home. Its history and politics form a prominent part of his works. He points out ideological and political conflict of India. He narrates the journeys of Indian history and politics very minutely. In “Auspicious Occasion”, “Lend Me Your Light”, “Paying Guest” and “Swimming Lessons”, he points out the minorities of Post-Colonial India, the corrupt people, the contribution of Parsis and the lack of opportunities for youngsters; and the lack of industrial developments. *Such a Long Journey* is an ideological presentation. It is an epistemological, postmodern text that tries to understand how black is made white and how white is made black. This chapter focuses to understand the discourse of Indian society with historical perspective. *Such a Long Journey* does not only try to understand the Parsi world, but it cannot be called to open hidden camera to get the real glimpses of Indian society. It presents multidimensional images to understand the ideologies working behind society and the formation of Post-Colonial India. All his novels are somehow political. His books are not merely the collection of dates, events and incidents but they are discussions, dialogues, discourses and episteme of their age. They deal with culture, institution and conflict of the age. These works have three eyes. They are established on the grounds of the past, interact with the present
and project the future. *Such a Long Journey* states the case of Nagarwala (a Parsi) and Mistry points out that an innocent man can be made a villain very easily if he has no political power. This novel focuses on Chacha Nehru’s ideology of secular India. It also points out how family can save anyone. His works trace the development of Indian history and politics since Indo-China and Indo-Pak War to Emergency period to the demolishing of Babri-Masjid and rising of the right-wing. It also brings forth the history of suppressed Dalits and politics [of which they became the victims] played with them. It is proved through discourse how the Dalits are historicised as mean, untouchables and powerless by upper caste power politics and ideology. Dukhi, Rupa, Ishvar, Narayan, Omprakash and several other persons are the victims of the same ideology and power politics.

His works present insider and outsider views about Indian history and politics. His works are the witness of a dying Parsi community. In some incidents, Mistry is very apt to describe the things but in some matters, he remains superficial, cut-off from Indian society, history and politics. He seems aloof to the reality of the beggars, Dalits; the outcasts accept their exploitation easily instead of showing anger. However, this status quo is maintained by the upper caste through their political, and historical ideology.

Women are the base of all family be it Hindu, Christian, Muslim or Parsi. Without women, family is unimaginable. Women in Parsi culture, religion are given very renowned place. But in contemporary time, Parsi women too have been marginalised in their community. For example, if a Parsi man marries a non-Parsi girl, their child will be accepted in Parsi clan as Parsi but if a Parsi girl marries a non-Parsi boy, the child will not be admitted in Parsi community.
In Mistry’s family and home, there are three types of women. First category comprises of women like Mehroo, Dilnavaz and Roxana who are submissive towards their husbands, family and children. All their movements are for the betterment of their family. They don’t do anything for their own selves. They give priority to Cooking, cleaning, caring for their families. They always stay within the four walls of their homes. They don’t complain to their husbands and don’t go for weekends and such things. Adultery is prohibited only for them not for their husbands. They cannot flirt. They cannot have male friends. They are not the bread-winners of their families.

In the second type, there are women like Daulat Mirza, Almai and Dina Dalal. Almai and Daulat Mirza have courage to question and defy tradition and patriarchy but they too do not travel outside their home. While Dina not only defies patriarchy but also travels outside her home and takes her independent stand in society. But Mistry does not allow her freedom for a long time and she is drawn back in the patriarchal world helplessly to be dependent upon her brother. The third category presents the unmarried independent women who follow their own will like Miss Kutputia, Coomy and Daisy Ichaporia.

It is a pre-conceived view that men can live without marriage as bachelors but women cannot. Mistry too portrays women characters, who are unmarried but they have some drawbacks. Miss Kutputia is unmarried but she is presented as a spinster, sorcerer. Miss Coomy who is very apt in business and an independent woman is also portrayed undesirable for a healthy family, home and society. She too is emotional but she does not serve her old stepfather [Nariman] whom she does not like. But who has given her a large flat to stay in. Ville Cardmaster, also known as “Matka-Queen” is a single woman who flirts with Yezad Chenoy. But all single women in Parsi community cannot be put in one slab, so he creates the talented, dynamic, beautiful
Daisy Ichaporia. She is also single unmarried but she has healing touch in her music. Mistry has avoided portraying strong women in his novels but Daisy Ichaporia is an exception. Ichaporia’s talent, skill and beauty are the talk of the people in Pleasant Villa. She practices her violin rigorously and is financially independent. She is mesmerising. She can hypnotize people through her music. Jal is infatuated towards her but watches her secretly and dares not to express his love for her. Daisy’s dream was to become a soloist in Bombay symphony and she follows it passionately. Music gives her liberty and she fully expresses her talent.

There is nothing wrong if we say that Rohinton, a born Indian Parsi, writes from the west. Like other diasporic writers, his works deal with nostalgia, memory, history, politics, alienation and a sense of time span. His first text is a collection of short stories, Tales from Firozsha Baag (1987), followed by Such a Long Journey (1991), A Fine Balance (1995) and Family Matters. (2002) However, Tales deals with Bombay and India after 1950 and Family Matters deals with 1980s to 1990s. In Tales, Mistry sticks to “Parsipanu or Parsiness.” (Bharucha, 27) In this text, he focuses on the rising problems of Parsis in Post-Colonial India. Their sense of alienation, being looked as Bawji (other), lack of opportunities (like in British days), sense of detachment and growing migration towards West in search of peaceful land of milk and honey. Parsi rituals, traditions, day-to-day living, their housing, quarrels, confusion are the primary concerns of the Tales. In “Squatters”, Sid migrates to Canada but finds it difficult to adjust to the western toilet and returns to India after ten years. At the same time, Kersi in “Swimming Lessons” is discriminated on the basis of colour. But at the end of the story, he learned to look under the water clearly. Hence, Mistry got the vision to look at Canada as well as at India. But after this story, Mistry didn’t write about Canadian life. His main focus remained on India and its history, politics, culture, people, Parsis
etc. He said in an interview that he will write about Canada when he finds worthwhile plot to write about. In *Such a Long Journey*, he moves a little ahead and now he focuses on “Parsi Identity and the challenges”. (Bharucha, 45) In this text, he points out the rising of Shiv Sena and other regional chauvinistic parties who are changing the names of the roads, processing and damaging government properties like bank etc. In this text, he also covers the incident of Nagarwala and Firoz Gandhi who became the victims of Indira Gandhi’s power politics. This novel also covers the Indo-China War and India’s shameful defeat.

However, in *A Fine Balance*, Mistry portrays Indira Gandhi’s disastrous power politics, plight of the Parsis, Muslims and Dalits. In her brand power politics, she imposed ‘Emergency’ in 1975. The reason given was of the security threat to nation. On the name of MISA, city beautification and family planning, the bureaucracy, doctors, police and politicians were doing whatever they wanted to do. During the Emergency, the fundamental rights, provided by the Indian Constitution were suspended; even the right to life was not exempted. On the name of ‘City Beautification’, slums were demolished without any prior notification. The beggars and the slum dwellers were caught and caged to work more than 12 hours a day without proper food and water. Indira’s son Sanjay ruled India. His reign too became full of horror as he allowed his self-lauded ‘birth control programme’. It created tremendous terror and nuisance in the society. It focussed forcible sterilisation of males who were married and had two or more children. But this was misused and taken as an opportunity to take vengeance and several unmarried, students, teachers were sterilised. It created a tragedy in the villages for the low caste people. Ishvar and Om are the wretched victims of this programme.
In *Family Matters*, once again he returns to Parsi family and to his Mumbai connection. Yezad Chenoy who we assume reflects the image of Rohinton Mistry, wants to migrate to Canada. He was dreaming about clean roads, clean air, clean water, seat for everyone in buses and trains, “I have a dream that one day soon I will be able to lift my head towards the Canadian sky and sing ‘O Canada’ with all our hearts.” (FM, 250) But the Canadian officers refused to provide him visa. And he retorts, “You, sir, a rude ignorant man, a disgrace to your office and country. You have sat here abusing us, abusing Indians and India, one of the many countries your government drains of its brain power.” (FM, 250) So, perhaps through Nariman, Mistry wants to convey his deep unconscious thought that migration is the greatest mistake we can make. Mistry delineates his memory, love, nostalgia, history of Bombay through Mr. Kapur. Kapur wanted to participate in MLC contest. For it, he journeys to Mumbai. He wants to feel it, he wants to realise it. He was boasting to Yezad that he would inject his blood in the veins of Mumbai when it is needed. But when the time came to contest election, he refused and preferred his family instead of Mumbai and nation. If we assume Mr. Kapur as a projection of Mistry’s love, nostalgia for Mumbai. We can see his great emotional attachment to India. One thing becomes clear here that Mistry would not prefer to return to India if he had been given the choice to choose between Canada and India. As Kapur refused to contest the election when he was expected to prove his love for Mumbai.

However, in his texts, we find two types of characters on the point of migration. Percy in *Tales*, Dukhi, Omprakash in *A Fine Balance*, Sohrab in *Such a Long Journey* and Nariman in *Family Matters*. Dukhi says, “. . . Besides, that’s where my ancestors have always lived. How can I leave that earth? It’s not good to go far from your native village. Then forget who you are.” (AFB, 108)
While Nariman says, “. . . emigration is an enormous mistake. The biggest anyone can make in their life. The loss of home leaves a hole that never fills.” (FM, 254)

Most of Mistry’s characters that leave their home are maladjusted in their new place. Sid in “Squatters” could not get service in Canada and returned to India. Kersi in “Swimming Lessons” is discriminated in a Canadian Swimming Pool due to his colour. Major Bilimoria, Dinshawji, Dukhi, Om, Ishvar, Maneck, Dina all have to suffer. Nariman, Dina and Dukhi return to their home and family. Hence, most of Mistry’s characters have quest for their home and family but most of them fail.

Family is the centre of all activities in Mistry’s texts. Mistry deals with three types of families. First, who are selfish, self-centered like Rustomji, Khorshedbai, Miss Kutputia, Mrs. Modi, Thakur Dharamsi, Nawaz and Coomy. All these characters put self-interest. Love, peace, harmony and welfare do not influences them. The first types are psychologically depressed and disturbed.

In the second type, Mistry states those characters who feel for their kith and kin, who feel for their neighbours. In this category, we can put characters like Mehroo (“Auspicious Occasion”), Daulat Mirza (“Condolence Visit”), Mr. Modi (“The Collectors”), Ardesar and Kashmira (“The Paying Guest”), Percy in (“Lend Me Your Light”) and Mumtaz (“A Fine Balance”). The characters are more normal.

The third type of family is extended family. In it every character thinks beyond self as well as his blood relatives. The whole village, society, district, state, nation become his or her family. Percy (“Lend Me Your Light”), Gustad Noble (Such a Long Journey), Dina Dalal, Asraf and Sirin Aunty (A Fine Balance), Mr. Kapoor (Family Matters) are such type of characters. We find that these characters possess a healthy mind. They are normal. They are totally committed to the welfare of the society. They
transcend the barriers of time and place and attain universality through their humane attitude.

Thus, my thesis proves Mistry’s quest for home and family from the basic structure of humanity and mankind. Mistry like diasporic writers is plunged in an emotional dilemma between the heart and the mind. Emotionally he yearns, is drawn towards the land of his birth but reason does not allow him to return. He thus becomes a divided self-rooted in India, living in Canada. Moreover, Mistry through his characters reveals this quest for home and family. This thesis shows how successfully Mistry and most of his characters transcend the barriers of religion, caste, time, space in their quest for family, love and home. Like other diasporic writers, he too watches India from an outsiders’ point of view, even though his heart remains in the land of his birth.

