CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the intense streaks of political imbalances and sufferings of the common people as discerned in Rohinton Mistry’s works. The objective of this thesis includes a detailed and analytical study of the selected works. Every human life is beset with so many problems and sufferings at different levels. It is impossible for any human beings to exist without facing problems or sufferings in the world. It is due to ignorance, people are entangled in various disturbances from birth to the last breath. It is true that people have to face problems throughout their life and there is no way to avoid them.

However, some problems are man-made, created by people according to their worldly understanding of life. Human beings’ problems are always based upon how to understand sufferings and conflict in the individuals. They have not only the physical problems but also more complicated psychological problems. Psychological problems always try to find only to rearrange their effects. Then, mental imbalance is also another big problem to human society.

The Bhagavad-Gita, the Bible and other religious books explain the cause of sufferings. They explain the resolution for sufferings and words have more importance than the understanding of sufferings itself. But any explanation and reasoning will not console suffered men. They want only relief, but not the explanation of sufferings.
Buddhism mainly points out ‘desire’ is the root cause of all type of sufferings of human beings in the world. Desire is like a great tree that has so many branches like ill, will, anger and passions in it. The tree is mainly rooted with ignorance and the fruits of the tree are sufferings. According to the Bhagavad-Gita, human suffering is real, but it is not permanent. It is caused by faulty thinking, perspectives, beliefs and attitudes. It depends upon the way people perceive things and react to them. These causes are still relevant in modern society and they are still effective in making people unhappy in their life with something or the other.

Most of the people never satisfied fully in their life like children. Because, children who frequently become satisfied with what they already have owned and shifted to another one. People always worry about their passions and possessions to enjoy, but the object of their needs pass away or break in it. Thus, suffering has vital place in every day of human life and has an important and unavoidable role of human journey of life.

Human suffering takes many forms: emotional, natural, and moral. Loneliness, anxiety, and grief are examples of emotional suffering. Fire, earthquake, storm, tsunami, and physical illnesses (e.g., cancer) are examples of natural suffering. Moral suffering is brought on by the deliberate acts of fellow human beings to cause suffering. These sufferings are always equal to each other and interweave among them.

According to philosophers, sufferings are caused by birth, death, sickness, old age and pain. But, real sufferings are caused by our own attitudes. Suffering is not a mistake that is a part of the self’s plan too. In other words, suffering is caused by
interpretation of situations. Poverty, ignorance, and inability are other dimensions of sufferings. These are natural phenomena, which frequently cause a state of anxiety, anger, jealousy, greed and sadness. From this way, most of the people are suffered from the effects of these calamities. It naturally happens in the common life of everyone.

Sufferings can ruin a person or it can make one strong. It always depends on ones sufferings in a positive way or a negative way. Each suffering produces its own influence on power, justice and freedom. Without faith, power and freedom, life is uncertain thing and the person becomes as a pessimist. It is usually connected with pain and unhappiness that threatens the individual’s integrity. Through this way, sufferings are always reflection or part of existentialism.

As a philosophy, Existentialism is historically and culturally European origin. It was recognized as the dominating philosophy of the West in the mid-twentieth century. Existentialism does not offer a set of doctrines or a single philosophy. It has been diversely defined and interpreted by various thinkers over the years. However, it is possible to identify certain traits of this school of thought. Existentialists emphasise the importance of the individual as well as freedom and responsibility for human being’s survival towards meaning of life. Then, they attempt to describe man’s existence and its conflicts, the origin of its conflicts and anticipation of overcoming them.

Existentialists focus their attention on certain aspects of human existence. They point out some aspects of existentialism as follows; it is never safe and it is full of suffering, conflict and guiltiness. These beliefs of existentialism have been widely
reflected in the literature of the world. John Macquarrie sums up spirit of existentialism as, “On the whole, it has been the tragic sense of life…” (Macquarrie, 164). Almost all great writers have handled the existentialism in their works. This is the main reason to handle or try to deal man’s alienation, absurdity, anguish, bad faith, dread, responsibility, commitment to freedom.

As a novelist, Rohinton Mistry reveals exploring the emotional world and the darker side of life of suffering people and downtrodden. Mistry further examines his protagonists as individuals who find themselves forced into uncongenial environments, fighting against the odds. Then, his writings portray these problems of the tragic tension between the individual and their unfavourable environment acquires the dimensions of existential anguish. Mistry’s characters are self-conscious of the reality around them and they carry a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. He adds the realities of life and plunges the deep-depths of the human psyche to score out its mysteries and chaos in the minds of characters.

Close study of the texture and theme of the novels in relation to the tenets of existentialism justifies the above observation. Mistry’s works deal with the existential anxiety experienced through his suffered protagonists. Thus, the existential themes of solitude, alienation, the futility of human existence and struggle for survival are the major themes of his works. Rohinton Mistry expresses his personal feelings over suffering heroes through his works with existentialism.
Further this introduction Chapter deals the biography of author and contribution of literature in general and Canadian literature in particular. The biography and contribution of author for deriving peaceful and unique culture and society in the globe is analysed in depth. Otherwise, Rohinton Mistry is an important figure in literature particularly contemporary commonwealth literature.

Literature is intimately related to society. Viewed as a whole, a body of literature is part of the entire culture of a people. The characteristic qualities that distinguish the literature of one group from that of another derive from the characteristic qualities of that group. Its themes and problems emerge from group activities and group situations, and its significance lies in the extent to which it expresses and enriches the totality of culture. It is an integral part of entire culture, tied by a tissue of connections with other elements in the culture.

Society influences literature in many ways and the connections of literature with society are integral and pervasive. In fact, the range for social influences on literature is as broad as the entire range of operative social forces. The prevailing system of social organization includes class structure, economic system, political organization, deeply rooted institutions, dominant ideas, characteristic emotional tone, sense of the past and then pattern of the contemporary realities. There is nothing in the compass of social life that does not play its part small or large, directly or by deflection, giving literature the impress of its surroundings.
The relation between literature and society is highly complex, and it is very
difficult to determine which element of society has exerted what influence on literature.
Therefore, everyone cannot afford to isolate a single element in society whether
economic or ideological and assign to it a causal role in the final determination of
literature. The whole social process including material, conceptual, emotional and
institutional elements may be regarded as containing the potential influences
determining the direction and character of literature of a period.

The term ‘Commonwealth’ has come from the word ‘Empire’ and is an historical
accident. From the beginning of fifteenth century, the British Empire expanded its
colonization all over the world. Many Islands and far off countries came under the rule
of the British Empire. There was a time when the sun never set on the British Empire.
But under the historical compulsions and changes, many countries won their republics.
Some countries still are under the British monarchy. These independent nations were
organized and became the member of commonwealth.

The most important commonwealth countries as Australia, Canada, New
Zealand, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have residents of English speaking population.
On the other hand, West Indies has mixed Europeans and coloured people in which
English is used for communication purposes. So, there is a natural response to study
English as it proves advantageous among them. In this respect, the Commonwealth
nations have a new literature in common and a great home-grown literature of their own.
That is called ‘Commonwealth Literature’.
The term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ applies to work that is generally accepted in English. The commonwealth literature has highly honoured cultural, national and linguistic features of the native countries especially the confluence of tradition and modernity. From the beginning of eighteenth century, Canada enjoys an enviable position with a rich store of great literature. Canadian Literature is a part of commonwealth literature.

Canadian Literature may be divided into two parts. One part of Canadian Literature is culture of French. The other part is in the traditions of England. On the other hand, Canadian Literature is grownup by immigrant authors. Canadian Literature reflects three main parts of Canadian experience (1) Nature, (2) Frontier life and (3) Canada’s position in the World. First is the effect of climate and geography on the life and work of their people. Second, Frontier life is part of Canada’s experience and many authors have taken themes from the world across Canada. Third, many writings reflect how Canadian writers feel about such positions and problems. On the other hand, Canadian writings are an imitation of colonial literature, because of the huge imaginations. Canadian literature has some following traits but it has no particular order. Failure as a theme, humour, multiculturalism, nature, satire and irony and self-deprecation are certain subjects treated in Canadian literature.

The first Canadian Novelist is called John Richardson. His ‘Waxousta’ (1832) popularized the nation’s historical novel and writers like T.C. Haliburton, William Kirby and Sir Gilbert Parker were very famous in early stage. In 1880’s, Canadian literature began to be noticed around the World. After 1990’s, Canadian literature is viewed as
some of the world’s best and Canadian authors begin to increase the international recognition and awards.

Rohinton Mistry belongs to the South Asian Diaspora. The establishment of the South Asian Diaspora provides identity to South Asian Writers including Rohinton Mistry. Indians, Sir Lankans, Pakistanis and Bangladesh People are called South Asians in Canada. Thus, Rohinton Mistry becomes a diasporic writer of the South Asian origin in Canada like Uma Paramewari, Michael Ondaatjee, Himani Banerjee, Yaswin Lada, Surjeet Kalsey, Meher Pestonji, Firduas Kanga, Bapsi Sidhwa, Tarukh Dhondy and others, and Diaspora also refers to being a minority community in a country.

The term Diaspora originally meant the dispersal of Jews. Acquiring the new nomenclature, it is reinterpreted as alienation, migration and marginalization or being in the minority. These are two phases of Diaspora namely the old and the new which suggests the migration to the indentured labour and the voluntary migration to a foreign land for brighter future respectively of the two phases of the Diaspora, Rohinton Mistry’s migration belongs to the second phase of the Diaspora.

In 1992 Michael Ondaatjee became the first Canadian to win the Booker prize for The English Patient, Margaret Atwood won the Booker in 2000 for The Blind Assassin, Yann Martel won it in 2002 for the Life of Pi and immigrant writer Rohinton Mistry won the Booker prize in 1991 for Such a Long Journey. Then, Rohinton Mistry is a remarkable and absorbing writer of human experiences in South Asian Diaspora such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shahi Tharoor, Vikram Seth and Bharthi
Mukharjee. On the other hand, as a Parsi, Mistry records the complex tradition of Parsi community and its cultural activities in his writings. Rohinton Mistry is also famous as a Parsi writer like Bapsi Sidhwa, Dina Mehata, Firdous Kanga, Ketè Daruwalla and Boman Desai.

Therefore, Rohinton Mistry occupies an important position among these writers of South Asian Diaspora. He is called a Canadian writer born in India. Although he now life in Canada, he sets his novels primarily in his native, Bombay with simple description to present an honest and loving image of India. His writings often explore the tragic circumstances of India’s desperate poor and their extended families.

Rohinton Mistry expresses his personal feelings over suffering heroes through his works. Rohinton Mistry has an extraordinary sensibility and he has a soft corner for the downtrodden and innocent people. He exposes the evils of exploitation of the people by the landlords, politicians and etc., in his novels. He handled many common problems of great political, religious, economic and literary activities in day-to-day life in his respective nation. Then, Poverty, ignorance, and inability interlink with individuals and society that role the characters with pragmatic way of life. These calamities are discussed in as an introduction point of view.

Rohinton Mistry is considered to be one of the famous authors who have gone out of India and writing in English. Rohinton Mistry is of Indian origin and belongs to Parsi community. Parsis are small, yet united, religious community in India, devoted to
Zoroastrianism, whose ancestors fled Islamic persecution in Iran during the eighth century.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India in 1952. He graduated with a degree in Mathematics from the University of Bombay in 1974 and immigrated to Canada with his wife, the following year, settling in Toronto, where he worked as a bank clerk, studying English and Philosophy part-time at the University of Toronto and completing his second degree in 1982. Mistry wrote his first short story, “One Sunday,” in 1983, winning First Prize in the Canadian Hart House Literary Contest and then an award he also won the following year for his short story “Auspicious Occasion.” It was followed in 1985 by the Annual Contributors’ Award from the Canadian Fiction Magazine, and afterwards, with the aid of a Canada Council grant, he left his job to become a full-time writer.

Rohinton Mistry’s early stories were published in a number of Canadian magazines and his short-story collection, Tales from Firozsha Baag, was first published in Canada in 1987. He is the author of three novels: Such a Long Journey (1991), the story of a Bombay bank clerk who unwittingly becomes involved in a fraud committed by the government, which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, A Fine Balance (1996), set during the State of Emergency in India in the 1970s, and Family Matters (2002), which tells the story of an old Parsi widower living in Bombay with his step-children. Such a Long Journey and A Fine Balance were both short-listed in previous years for the Booker Prize for Fiction and Family Matters was short listed in 2002 for Booker Prize for Fiction.
Mistry’s fiction is rooted in the streets of Bombay, the city he left behind for Canada at the age of twenty-three. Tales from Firozsha Baag (1992), Mistry’s first collection of stories 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 stories narrate the day-to-day life of the residents of a decrepit apartment block in Firozsha Baag in Bombay. Mistry’s affectionate thumb nail sketches struggles and sorrows of Rustomji, the deranged Jaakaylee and Percy, who is able to look up girls’ skirts with the aid of his torch.

As Rushdie puts in, Rohinton Mistry is a “writer from elsewhere”. However being a Parsi origin, Rohinton Mistry is more concerned with the tribulations and the idiosyncrasies of Bombay Parsis. Mistry explores the relationships at the heart of their community, their cultural identity and uniqueness of their community living in his novels. Rohinton Mistry uses ‘ordinary’ men and women as his protagonists and fills his novels with sights, sounds, smells, and colour of India. Depicting his characters as neither saints nor sinners, he involves the reader in their life as they try to survive the complexities of their culture.

**SUCH A LONG JOURNEY**

Such a Long Journey unfolds the life of the common people in Bombay. Gustad and life of his daily hard work and sufferings, problems of his friends and Kath and kin and indeed the inviolable background of the Indo Pak war forms the base of the story. It
is a marvellous collection illustrating day to day life in a unique way. It is beautifully constructed and emotionally involving the story of a small family trying to live meaningful life against almost overwhelming odds. The characters are finely drawn, and the plot reflects the traumas of an ordinary man and his wife caught up in events and crises not of their own making. Mistry got good exposure of a writer by writing the novel Such a Long Journey. Thus, this novel helped Mistry to promote his writing carrier to the hilt.

The backdrop of Such a Long Journey is set in Bombay and the time of 1971s. The central character of the novel is very hard-working bank clerk named Gustad Noble. He is a devoted family man. He works hard to maintain his family properly. He has Dilnavaz, his wife and three children in his family. But he has some problems in his life when his eldest son Sohrab refuses to attend the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology to which he has gained admittance. His youngest daughter Roshan falls ill. These, conflicts within the novel involve Gustad’s ongoing interactions with his eccentric neighbours and relationship with his close friend and co-worker, Dinshawji. Gustad receives a letter one day from an old friend, Major Bilimoria, slowly draws him into a government deception involving threats, secrecy and large amounts of money. Throughout the novel, the wall outside Gustad’s apartment building symbolizes the larger world of Bombay and parallels some aspects of Gustad’s own life. At the outset, it is used as a latrine, breeding illness in the neighbourhood. Gustad tries something to come out of this problem. He persuades a sidewalk artist to paint it, and consequently he
depicts scenes from all the religions of India. Thus, the wall transformed as a holy place. Eventually the government decides to widen the road and tear it down.

Inviolable background of the Indo Pak War forms the background of the novel *Such a Long Journey*, in which Mistry has etched out the tales of common Bombay. *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Mistry’s first novel, won numerous literary awards when it was first published and has since been adapted for film. The novel is set in 1971 during the time of the Indian Pakistan war. Its protagonist is no conventional hero, however: Gustad Noble is a bank clerk and a family man, a vulnerable figure whose world is still haunted by the war with China in 1962. The fate of Gustad’s family is closely bound up with that of the subcontinent during a time of crisis and turmoil. Gustad’s daughter’s illness and his son’s refusal to go to college are events that encourage to read the novel *Such a Long Journey*. When Gustad receives a parcel and a request to launder money for an old friend, the event’s ramifications are at once personal and political.

**A FINE BALANCE**

The story of *A Fine Balance* is set at the backdrop at the time of 1975 in India, in an unnamed city by the sea. The government has just declared a State of Emergency, and the country is on the edge of chaos. In these precarious circumstances, four strangers are forced to share one cramped apartment and an uncertain future. Their background is different and so do their habit. But ultimately they become dependent on each other and thus story proceeds.
A Fine Balance brings new understanding about India’s struggles with poverty and caste systems. Cultures and traditions are displayed through this story using four main characters and involving many secondary characters to make this novel so realistic. Rohinton Mistry meshes the life of four people of diverse backgrounds into a bond that lasts a lifetime. Dina Dalal, a widow to make it as an independent woman in a world where women have little value, becomes the unwilling glue that supports three other lives. Maneck Kohlah is a student and he is sent by his parents from his mountain village to attend college in the city. Ishvar Darji and his nephew Omprakash are tailors escaping the terror in their village by moving to the city to look for work. This unlikely group of people becomes dependent on each other out of necessity, their life entangling to create the basis of the story as well.

This novel is sometimes crude while sometimes cruel. The story mainly deals with the story of India during the 70s and the changes, it was going through as well as the corrupt government. Here’s a novel to make an American feel the privileges our country gives us, or any truly free country. Uncertain future of the young individuals in the precarious circumstances of 1975, when the Government has declared the State of Emergency is ideally portrayed in A Fine balance.

A Fine Balance, critically Mistry’s most successful work to date, tells the story of four characters as Maneck, Dina, Ishvar and Omprakash and the impact of Indira Gandhi’s state of emergency on them. One of the most successful aspects of this novel is its carefully crafted prose. The morning express bloated with passengers slowed to a crawl, and then lurched forward suddenly, as though to resume full speed. The train’s
brief deception jolted its riders. The bulge of humans hanging out of the doorway distended perilously, like a soap bubble at its limit. This intricate opening paragraph, which is typical of the precise prose of *A Fine Balance* throughout, helps drive the novel forward through what is one of the most memorable portraits of post-Independence India ever written.

**FAMILY MATTERS**

*Family Matters* (2002), is based in Bombay once again. Mistry’s first two novels were set in the 1970s and were essentially historical fictions. However, *Family Matters* depicts contemporary Bombay and is set in the 1990s. At the centre of the novel is an old man, a Parsi with Parkinson’s disease. Nariman Vakeel is a retired professor whose illness places renewed strains on family relations. His memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the city’s, and the nation’s history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family.

Familiar slippage between public and private world is observed in *Family Matters*. Similarly the life of the residents of ‘Chateau Felicity’ (Nariman’s former residence) and ‘Pleasant villa’ (where he is forced to move by his scheming step daughter) recall the world of Firozsha Baag. Where the earlier novels tended towards a decisive closure however, the epilogue of this novel seems much less ready to console. The novel portrays the feelings of an adolescent who gets addicted to stamp collection and gets carried away. It also portrays how events hurt in many ways. At the end when
Jahangir left the boxful of precious stamps, which he gets from Dr. Mody, touch the reader’s heart.

**TALES FROM FIROZSHA BAAG**

The collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* by Rohinton Mistry aptly satisfies the title as this contained the stories of the lifestyle of the residents living in the apartment named Firozsha Baag. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is a collection of eleven short stories about the residents of Firozsha Baag. This is a creation of India born Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry. Firozsha Baag is a Parsi-dominated apartment complex in Mumbai. All the stories deal with the same location, and thus the title of the story truly signifies it. *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, though a lesser-known work by Rohinton Mistry, still captures with vivacity, the rich and complex patterns of life of lower middle class families inhabiting an apartment in Bombay. Mistry’s Characterisation in this story is fabulous as he sketches Jaakaylee, an ayah and the Baag’s ghost seer.

*Tales from Firozsha Baag* is the story of the lifestyles of the inhabitants living in the apartment named Firozsha Baag. Rohinton Mistry, being himself, belonging to Parsi community, experiences the Diasporic issues and as a writer he shed light over these issues. He is a writer who makes up a part of the Indian Diaspora. His short stories as well as in his novel, Mistry underscores both the heterogeneous nature of one community’s identity and its vitality. Traumatism in its inevitability brings change to the
characters’ life, which Mistry focuses in his fictions. What he affirms is the power and pliability of the individual and that of the community in a world without a shred of pity.

All the stories in the novel Tales from Firozsha Baag is written in an excellent manner. Its different stories show the language of love from different angle, e.g. father-son, lover-lovee, and other emotional tales of human life. Mistry always advocates for the independence of the women and in his novels are always noted a protest of the women against the conventional arranged marriage. His works bear often marked with a colour of feminism. His females are fortuitous and choose their own male counterpart. The works of Rohinton Mistry are highly acclaimed and are considered as the masterpiece of the postcolonial literature.

PRIZES AND AWARDS


1985, Annual Contributors’ Prize, Canadian Fiction Magazine.


1991, Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction (Canada) Such a Long Journey.


1995, Giller Prize (Canada) *A Fine Balance*.

1996, Booker Prize for Fiction, Commonwealth Writers Prize *A Fine Balance*.

1997, Irish Times International Fiction Prize (shortlist) *A Fine Balance*.

2002, James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) (shortlist) *Family Matters*.


2002, Man Booker Prize for Fiction (shortlist) *Family Matters*.

2004, International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (shortlist) *Family Matters*.

Rohinton Mistry’s novels brought him national and international recognition. Mistry’s works spread a precise writing style and sensitivity to the humour and horror of life to communicate deep compassion for human beings. His writings concern people who try to find own self while dealing with painful family dynamics and difficult social and political constraints. His work also addresses immigration, especially immigration to Canada, and their cultural differences.

Rohinton Mistry’s works seem to be found that an author carry a mirror for the dusty highways of Indian society. Hence, the author shows the characters of poor people as a life of their own. Rohinton Mistry satirises vehemently the exploitations of the powerful people over the poor and downtrodden. Rohinton Mistry uses his works as a weapon against the exploiters. It has a deeper insight of political, nativity, and struggles such as ‘a slice of life’ of Indians and ‘picturesque’ of suffering people.
Thus, Rohinton Mistry conveys his message of shunning exploitation of people to the world through his works. He doesn’t stop with attacking the social evils in his respective society. He also conveys better solutions to those social inequalities and evils through his writings. Rohinton Mistry’s novels made some tremendous changes in his respective society. It enables the readers to respect the feeling of other man as they do to their own. It will pave way for the peaceful life on the earth.