CONCLUSION

Rohinton Mistry is a writer of prodigious talents on the Canadian literary scene. As a diasporic writer of South Asian background, he has addressed issues relating to the Indian diaspora with wit and humour and a strong sense of artistic integrity. The richness of language and texture which he brings to his craft is something which is of considerable interest to his readers. While M.S.Vassanji has given us an authentic documentary of the Indian diaspora in East Africa in his novel *The Gunny Sack* where he traces the history of a Gujarathis, Rohinton Mistry and Bharati Mukherjee are well known immigrant Canadian writers whose literary creation makes our concept of literature of the Indian diaspora in Canada quite clear.

Bharati Mukherjee, now in the USA, can boast of a triple inheritance, from her Bengali Indian antecedents to the years spent in an American University, and further to the experience of living and teaching in Canada. In works like *Wife* and *Jasmine* she provides a realistic account of the pressures facing an Indian woman in a male-dominated North American society. In Bharati Mukherjee’s collection of short stories, *The Middleman and Other Stories*, the immigrant
experience is best illustrated in a story entitled “The Management of Grief.” It is a fictional account of some Canadians of Indian origin who have lost their close relatives in the Air India Jumbo Jet disaster off the coast of Island. A majority of the travellers are Indians, and significantly, the flight which originated in Canada was on its way to India. Bharati Mukherjee expresses the sense of grief of those left behind in Canada with an authentic Indian voice.

If Bharati Mukherjee, with her Indian background, writes about the immigrant experience in Canada, Rohinton Mistry, while living in his adopted home, writes most authentically about his experience in India before going to Canada. Rohinton Mistry was a Parsi born in Bombay in 1952 and immigrated to Canada in 1975. His three works of fiction, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), and *A Fine Balance* (1995) are widely acclaimed for their evocation of Indian life and feel of the texture of Indian life, mores, customs, and superstitions. *Such a Long Journey* is a set in Bombay against the backdrop of the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh as an Independent nation. The novel tells the story of a Parsi Bank official, Gustad Noble, and the way in which the conflict in the sub-continent images the tensions that beset him and his family. Mistry manages to convey a vivid picture of India through sharp affectionate sketches of the Indian family life in this
novel which was short-listed for the 1991 Booker Prize and which won for Mistry the 1992 Commonwealth Writers Prize.

A remarkable thing about *Such a Long Journey* is its absolute Indianness, without any trace of the Canadian immigrant experience that the author must have gone through for fifteen years before the publication of the book. It is steeped in the atmosphere of Bombay, particularly of the exclusive Parsi community of that city. The Khodadad Building, an apartment house, where Gustad Noble lives along with his Parsi neighbours, is a world in itself. Dilnavaz, his wife, is beset by the usual Indian superstitions, encouraged by Miss Kupititia, the mysterious spinster. When Sohrab, the elder son of Gustad, refuses to join the IIT against the wishes of his father and leaves home, Dilnavaz circles a lemon over his head, offering the juice of it in a sweetened drink to the half-wit, Tehmul-lungraa. For general good luck, she hangs a lemon and some green chillies on a string above the front door from inside. Again, she consults Miss. Kupititia when baffled by the prolonged illness of her daughter Roshan in order to devise ways of warding off the evil eye.

*Peerbhoi Paanwala* in *Such a Long Journey* is an institution by himself. He has a *paan* for all seasons, but the one most in demand is the bed-breaker of palungtode *paan* with its renowned aphrodisiacal properties possessing a rich faculty for myth-making. Peerbhoi suggests that even the Moghul emperors used this variety of *paan*
when they went to their harems. To young boys, he would offer a *paan* which would cleanse their heads of boyish impurities and help them concentrate on their studies. When the Bangladesh war is at its apex, Peerbhoy rises to great heights in weaving a myth about the doings of Gen. Yahya Khan and his military governor of East Pakistan. Thus the novel is replete with episodes which recall popular myths and local colour.

Gustad Noble's dreams and expectations are modest indeed. But circumstances prevailing in the India of his times conspire to deny him even his modest dreams. It is very hard on him that he cannot make things happen in such a way as to fulfil his aspirations. Forces, stranger than himself, come in the way of his achieving his ambitions. His elder son does not join the IIT. Roshan, his favourite child, suffers from a prolonged illness; Dinshawji, his best friend, dies of cancer; and another friend, Bilimoria betrays his trust. Gradually, Gustad Noble modifies his dreams and dilutes his expectations. It is quite obvious that he is not in control of things. But this does not turn him into a defeatist. His triumph consists in the forbearance with which he faces each trial of his life. His grandest moment comes towards the end of the novel when he forgives his erring son Sohrab, and clasps him to his bosom in a noble gesture of acceptance of his decision to lead his own life.
*A Fine Balance* is a large novel extending to 762 pages like Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and thus in a sense a match to the great Victorian novels of Dickens and Thackeray, at least in its awesome length. It is interesting to note that Mistry does not touch at all upon his Canadian background but makes the most of what is available to him in this "area of darkness." The secret longings of the poor and their pursuit in trying to build a new life for themselves is the focus of the novel, as the poor and the oppressed go about their existence in Bombay. *A Fine Balance* springs from a lively imagination and a detached look at the Indian background. In this novel, which begins in 1975 and ends with an epilogue dated 1984, a grim saga of India during the Emergency is portrayed. What is more important is that we find in the tale a history of cultures of oppression. We are confronted with problems of caste and communalism and the humiliation that the downtrodden go through without any respite. Om and Ishvar, Shankar and Rajaram, the Beggarmaster and others portrayed in the novel appear to be willing victims who joyfully open their hearts and homes to predators who are their own compatriots. In this charged atmosphere, Dina seems to be possessing a capacity to wipe a tear from the eyes of the poor. While the novel is concerned with the happenings in the house, in the city, in India, it is not as though it is a novel full of gory details, sadness, sympathy, and pity. Its representations have the unmistakable touch of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. Not even the minutest details escape the eye of the
master craftsman. Nor does he pass a moral judgement on plight of human beings. To him the real human comedy is important. What is further important is the characters' ability to construct new lives which become entwined in circumstances no one could have foreseen.

The title of the novel, drawn from W.B.Yeats, emphasizes the idea of a balance between hope and despair. That is what Mr.Valmik exclaims towards the end of the novel. This narrative demonstration of the balancing of hope and despair by a subtle interweaving of overlapping stories and the use of the devices of memory and imagination is one of the finest achievements of *A Fine Balance*. What is again important in Rohinton Mistry's use of language in *A Fine Balance* is that a localization trend is set in motion which is a popular movement among Indian writers of English in the post-colonial era.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, we have eleven interesting stories revealing rich and complex patterns of life inside a Bombay apartment building. The occupants – from Jaakalyee, through Najamai, the only owner of a refrigerator in Firozsha Baag, Rustomji, and to Karsi, the young boy whose life threads through the book and who narrates the final story – all express the tensions between the past and the present, between the old world and the new. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* does illuminates the very meaning of change through a densely textured mosaic of lives. Rohinton Mistry is an insider to Firozsha Baag, Bombay, and his vignettes are naturally authentic. Ironically perhaps
Mistry is able to achieve this authenticity by distancing himself. By immigrating to Canada, he can produce the effect of an insider/outsider on a scene every detail of which is etched and engraved in his mind. Remembering, re-enacting, re-creating that place, time, and people with accuracy, understanding, and insight is the vision of Rohinton Mistry. With the skill of a miniature painter, Mistry peels off layer after layer of the residents of the Baag:

"Something would have to be done about peeling paint and plaster; in some places the erosion was so bad, red brick lay exposed." The residents of the Baag lie totally exposed in an excellent "exposition." Mistry has an eye for detail and his vignettes are executed with a deft hand where the local colour is pronouncedly manifest.

"Auspicious Occasion" Francis the thief in "One Sunday," Jaakaylee the ayah in "The Ghost of Firozsha Baag," The Swimmers in "Swimming Lessons" all help in defining the local colour of Firozsha Baag. The neighbouring Tar Gully, Mehroo's outing on Behram roje, Rustomji's own misadventure, Najamai's visit to Bandra and the goings on in her flat in her absence, the pranks, the boisterious boys in the Baag, all detail the elements of the local colour in graphic terms:

Plaster had been drifting for some years now in this A Block flat as it had been in most of the flats in Firozsha Baag .... When neighbours, under the leadership of Nariman Honsotia, had decided to pool some money and hire a contractor to paint the
exterior of A Block, Rustomji, on principle, refused to hand over his share, the building had acquired an appalling patina of yellow and grey grimness.\textsuperscript{2}

Rohinton Mistry's works no doubt deal with humanity in general and the broader issues of the nation in particular thus giving rise to the assertion of humane values. At the same time, Rohinton Mistry's works centralize the Parsi community. This is especially true of immigrant writers from the minority communities. For instance, in Vassanji's novels \textit{The Gunny Sack} and \textit{No New Land} it is the odyssey of his Khoja community in particular and that of Asian community in general that is significant. Similarly, Firdaus Kanga in his \textit{Trying to Grow}, Farrukh Dhondy in \textit{Bombay Duck}, Bapsi Sidhwa in \textit{The Crow Eaters} and \textit{The Pakistani Bride} reflect the Parsi community in diverse hues. Their works exhibit a marked consciousness of their community in a way that the community emerges as a protagonist. Rohinton Mistry has demonstrated this by responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community and also to the country. The plight of the community and the crisis the country passes through are intertwined in his narrative. He presents his community through the different narratives of his characters who invariably express their concern for their community and the changes that affect their community. Since their fate is bound up with the fate of their community, their stories tend to be the stories of their community.
Rohinton Mistry's sensitivity of the impending dangers to his community is expressed by his characters' consciousness of these changes. In a nutshell, Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* centralizes the Parsi community in many ways.

The range of achievement in the literature by Asian Canadian writers speaks of the diversity of thematic concerns that parallels contemporary homogeneity of the multicultural group. Asian Canadian works are not situated in, nor do they contribute to a cohesive, united tradition. Rather, certain cultural elements appear to be shared by authors from varying histories and origins. The historical and social underpinning of this literature needs to be carefully evaluated. These writers are constructing strikingly new identities that are at times contrary to the Eurocentric model. The novels of these writers require on the part of the reader a consciousness of bi-cultural, bi-national aesthetics and linguistic formation.

REFERENCES
