



**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF CANADA**

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Press Release for Immediate Release

WRITERS DECRY BANNING OF CANADIAN NOVEL IN INDIA

The Writers' Union of Canada is expressing its strong concern over the decision of the University of Mumbai to remove a Canadian novel from its course of study, bowing to pressure from a right-wing political group that publicly burned the book. The novel, *Such a Long Journey* by Canadian author Rohinton Mistry, was removed following angry objections from the ultra-nationalist political party known as Shiv Sena over a character in the novel who criticizes that organization.

Such a Long Journey was originally published in 1991. It won the Governor General's Award for literary fiction in Canada and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the UK. It has been studied, without protest, in schools and universities around the world for nearly twenty years.

"It is unacceptable for an institution of higher learning such as the University of Mumbai to practice censorship of this nature," said Alan Cumyn, Chair of the Writers' Union of Canada. "This award-winning Canadian novel deals in a fictional, naturalistic way with life in India. Freedom of expression must be a cornerstone of any democracy, especially the world's largest. We call upon the university to reinstate the book."

Canadian schools are not immune to similar challenges. The Harry Potter series has been often challenged by religious groups for its portrayal of witchcraft. In 2006 the highly regarded children's book, *Three Wishes*, by author Deborah Ellis was pulled from school library shelves by the Toronto District School Board following an objection from the Canadian Jewish Congress, which deemed the author's interviews with Palestinian children to be offensive. More recently Anne Laurel Carter's award-winning *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* was also challenged and subjected to a formal review by the Toronto District School Board.

"We have stood behind books like *Three Wishes* and *The Shepherd's Granddaughter*, and we stand by Rohinton Mistry in this case," Cumyn went on. "Literature offers us a way to look at ourselves, to hear voices from around the world. And Rohinton Mistry said it best himself: '... burning and banning books will not feed one hungry soul, will not house one homeless person, will not provide gainful employment to anyone (unless one counts those hired to light bonfires), not in Mumbai, not in Maharashtra, not anywhere, not ever.'"

The Writers' Union of Canada is the country's national organization representing 2,000 professional authors across the country. Founded in 1973, the Union is dedicated to fostering writing in Canada and protecting freedom of speech, as well as promoting the rights, freedoms, and economic wellbeing of all writers. For more information, please visit www.writersunion.ca.

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