



The Depiction of India in *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry

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Abstract

The purpose of present research paper is to depict India. To study this, I selected the contemporary Indian English fiction *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry. The writers like Rohinton Mistry, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, and Meena Alexander are innovative experimental novelists in the contemporary world of Indian Fiction in English. The depiction of India has always provided an outstanding fertile ground for the development of Indian English Fiction. Here, this India is depicted through tradition, status of women, politics, emergency and homelessness. It appeals to the readers to know more about India.

Keywords: *tradition, status of women, politics, emergency, homelessness*

Full Text

A Fine Balance (1995) is a milestone in the history of Indian English fiction as well as in Indian-Canadian writing by Rohinton Mistry. Mistry has emerged as a eminent literary figure during the recent years. He uses memory and imagination to depict a turbulent period in Indian history. The title of the novel is the frail equilibrium. This speaks about to maintain fine balance between hope and despair. One observes the depiction of India through tradition, status of women, politics, emergency and homelessness. The works of Mistry is community centered substance of the Parsi and their taking part with the wider national framework. It is essential to know about the political, social and economic background of the novel to make our ideas more clearly.

There was British colony in India. British officials decided to give Independence if its leaders could agree upon a form of government. The violence between Hindus and Muslims started because of disagreement between Congress party and Muslim League. Indian and British decided to do partition. So, Shikhs and Hindus moved to India and Pakistan. I found that the impact of partition is on the lives of Narayan, Ishvar, Om, Farokh Kholah in the novel. India got Independence in 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of India. He died in 1964. Lal Bahadur Shastri's rule was more violent and bloody. Shastri declared war on Pakistan after it invaded two regions of India. He died in 1966. The appointments of Indira Gandhi to the head of the ruling Congress party were considered a compromise between right and left wings of party. The question of leadership against Indian is raised by right-wingers in the party. New Congress party owns a victory in 1972. Indira Gandhi was alleged by the socialist party for committing electoral malpractice. High court declared that she would lose her seat and be obliged to stay out of policies for six years.

Mrs. Gandhi instructed the President of India to announce the state of emergency before midnight on June 25, 1975. She sent her political enemies to imprisonment. She passed laws that limited personal freedom. She also placed nation's press under strict censorship. Emergency was initiated by Sanjay Gandhi. Here, in the novel, in the guise of beautification a process of slum clearance and family planning was imposed on the lives of people. They were clearing poor by away from areas. People were forced to be sterilized. Indira Gandhi also defeated in the open elections in 1977. She returned to Parliament in 1978. Sanjay Gandhi was killed in a plane crash in 1980. Indira began to prepare Rajiv, her second son for the leadership of New Congress party. She ruled again as prime Minister in 1980. Her assassination was done in 1984 by two of her Shikh bodyguards. India's different populations sought more Independence from central government in the early 1980's. Shikhs extremists in Punjab region resorted to violence to voice their demands for

autonomy. Indira replied by ordering an army attack on the Sikh's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple of Amritsar in 1984. In this attack, more than four hundred and fifty Sikhs were killed. Indira Gandhi increased the use of military force in nation and encouraged a culture of nepotism during the emergency.

One observes that tradition plays an important role to depict India in *A Fine Balance*. It is mentioned in *Prologue*, in the story of Ishvar and Omprakash. Our characters Ishvar and Omprakash's family is a part of the chammaar caste. They traditionally curved leather and were considered as untouchable. Ishvar's father apprentices his sons Ishvar and Narayan to a Muslim tailor, Ashraf Chacha in a nearby town in an attempt to break away from the restrictive caste system. They became tailors. Narayan's son Om is influenced by their skills. Dastoor has earned title of Dustoor Daabchaab. Mrs. Shroof died on the day of Shahenshali calendar as her husband. Their prayers were performed consecutively at the same fire temple by Dustoor Framji.

One studied the status of women is depicted in *A Fine Balance* in the form of Dina Dalal. Dina is a Parsi widow who tries to maintain her independence from her over bearing brother. She started a tailor's shop in her own flat. Dina sewed baby clothes and knitted little caps and pullovers. She saves money. She used to go museums, market, cinemas, and library. Nusswan, brother of Dina questions status of women:

Do you know how fortunate you are in our community? Among the unenlightened, windows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in old days you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto your husband's pyre, be roasted with him. (Mistry, 52).

Nusswan thinks that she can do house work. He is forcing her to do the cooking, cleaning, drop out of school. He is also hitting her when she misbehaved. Dina found her own husband Rustom Dalal, a chemist at a concert hall. Thus, Dina Dalal at the ending of the novel lost her prized independence. She had to seek shelter in the patriarchal protection of her elder brother Nusswan.

One brings out the depiction of India is reflected through politics of the nation in that era in *A Fine Balance*. The political background of the Post-Independence India is depicted in Mistry's novel. There are two ways to read politics in the novels of Mistry in the sense of the state and national politics and in the terms of cultural policies. It focuses on the role of the individual within family, community, and nation. Mistry speaks through the character of Dina Dalal. She said: Government makes law without thinking. (Mistry, 304).

The main points of politician's speeches were the struggle for justice, notion of untouchability, matters related to the freedom struggle, caste system. Thakur

Dharmasi who always took charge of the district polls at election time, delivering voter to the political party of his choice. He taunted the tailor periodically. Thakur Dharmasi symbolizes violence and power. Gandhiji's dream about 'harijans' remains a dream. An indirect reference to RSS became active in perpetrating crimes against Muslims in Post-colonial era. The politicians were promises about new schools, clean water, health care, promises of land for landless peasants, stricter enforcement of the land ceiling, child labor, sati dowry system, child marriage etc. The election officers were presented with the gifts and lead away to enjoy the day with food and drink. The people were forced their thumbs to the ink pad and completed the registration.

The bitter reality is presented by gundas. The gundas of Thakur exploited people. They also urinated on the three inverted faces and burning coals were held to the three men's genitals. Three were hanged. Avinash, friend of Meneck was the student President, later involved in political events. Ashraf Chacha with Om went to the police station to register a first information report. The Sub Inspector reported that nothing was found to support charges of murder. The Sub Inspector said:

What kind of rascality is this? Trying to fill up the F.I.R. with lies? You filthy achhoot castes are always out to make a trouble! Get out before we charge you with public mischief! (Mistry, 148).

Maneck attended a few rallies and protests in order to support Avinash. There were new groups in campus like students for democracy, sister's organization, and students against fascism. The party workers have given message from the Prime Minister that she is holding a big meeting today and everyone is invited to attend. The party worker said: The Prime Minister's message is that she is your servant and wants to help you. She wants to hear about things from your own lips. (Mistry, 258).

Sergent Kesar was in charge of constables who forced people to come and sit in a bus for meeting. The monkeyman's monkey was not allowed to go with him. Their names were Laila and Majnu. The Prime minister said:

And our newly-formed flying squads will catch the gold smugglers, uncover corruption and black-money, and punish the tax evaders who keep our country poor. You can trust your government, support the Emergency. (Mistry, 265-266).

With addition of this, the Shiv Sena volunteers said in the cinema hall: Respect the national anthem! Your mother land needs you during the emergency! Patriotism is a sacred duty! (Mistry, 281).

One finds the emergency is the major focus of the selected novel *A Fine Balance*. This depiction at the time of emergency is presented very accurately by Mistry. The discussion of emergency begins in the novel: Dinabai, what is this emergency we here about? Government problems- games played by people in power. It doesn't affect ordinary people like us. (Mistry, 8).

The character of Dina Dalal saw banners and slogans accused the Prime Minister of misrule and corruption. They were calling on her to resign in keeping with the court judgment finding her guilty of malpractice. The Prime Minister's declaration of internal emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition along with thousands of trade unionist, students and social workers. The Prime minister's message is on the poster 'The need of Hour is Discipline.' When emergency declared in India, political activists had to go into hiding in order to safe. Maneck was ragged by hostel student. So, his mother arranges another place for him. He moves towards Dina Dalal.

The effects of emergency bother people. The Shanty town where the tailors live is knocked down in a government 'beautification' program. The residents are uncompensated and forced to move into the streets. Ishvar and Om sold to labor camp. They were helped by Beggarmaster. Om, Ishvar and Chacha ran into herders from the Family Planing centre. They were beaten and forced sterilization. Mrs. Gupta said: The emergency is good medicine for the nation. It will soon cure everyone on their bad habits. (Mistry, 352).

Rajaram was the motivator of family planning. There were articles about abuses during the emergency, testimony of torture victims, outrage over the countless deaths in police custody. Ishvar said Doctor: Please Doctorji! Not my nephew! Cut me as much as you like! But forgive my nephew! His marriage is being arranged! (Mistry, 534).

One found that the depiction of India is seen through homelessness of Maneck in *A Fine Balance*. Homelessness is the main feature of Third world Literature. Maneck is born in mountain town. Mr. and Mrs. Kohlah were his loving parents. His father owned a grocery store. It had in the family for generations. The store sold household necessities and manufactured the locally popular soda, Kohlah Cola. Maneck spent his days going to school, helping at the store and going on walks with his father. Then, Maneck was sent to boarding school when he was in forth standard. Maneck learned to tolerate boarding school but not to love it. Maneck was remembering his house, parents, shop, and mountains. He feels nostalgic and remembers his childhood memories. He mentioned in the written letter that the hostel is horrible place, the people are disgusting, gundas were allowed to live in the hostel and they get drunk and fight.

His relationship with parents deteriorates. He does not wish to be separated from them and feels betrayed. His parents sent him to a college and picked his major, refrigeration and air- conditioning. Eight years later, Maneck returns home for the second time from Dubai for his father's funeral. He attends father's funeral and missed the father of his young childhood.

To conclude, one brings out into focus that the selected novel *A Fine Balance* depicts about India through tradition, status of women, politics, emergency and homelessness. This creates interest in the mind of readers to know more about India.

Work cited

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance*. London: Paperback, 2006. Print.