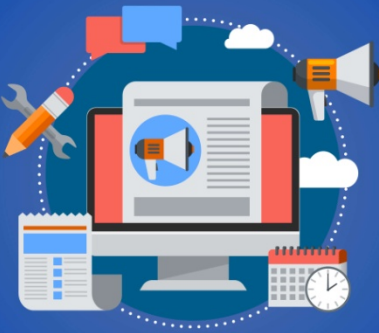


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## Thematic Concerns in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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### **Abstract:**

*A Fine Balance* is written by Rohinton Mistry, which reflects the horrors of Emergency. The novel reflects other themes also including caste system, ragging, problems and life of Parsi people. Mistry has portrayed the realistic portrayal of Emergency and its impact upon citizens of India. Through major characters novelist wanted to show that people in India have been facing so many problems. The novel captures all the cruelty and corruption, dignity and heroism of India. The city described in the novel is Bombay. The government has just declared a State of Emergency, where four strangers are victims, including a spirited widow, a young student from hill station, and two tailors from village, came together, forced to share one cramped apartment and an uncertain future. *A Fine Balance* reveals the picture of human spirit in an inhuman state.

**Keywords:** Emergency, Caste System, victims, Horrors, India.

### **Introduction**

*A Fine Balance* is the story of four characters from diverse backgrounds. The novel is reflection of National Emergency during in 1975 and 1984 in an unidentified city in India. The book concerns the horrors of caste system in India and the characters also belong from the different backgrounds. The novel got Giller Prize in 1995 and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996. The lengthy passages of the novel trace the early lives of the major characters. *A Fine Balance* is an extraordinary novel and it is a timeless, realistic epic; without question brilliantly gripping incidents, setting, technique etc. The present novel is an impassioned indictment of India's corrupt and horrible picture of society during India's State of Internal Emergency of 1970s. The protagonists, Dina, Ishvar, Om and Maneck are victims of the times whose suffering are disparate but equally devastating.

The characters from the novel Dina Dalal, Ishwar Darji, his nephew Omprakash Darji and the young student Maneck Kohlah are victims of circumstances. Thus placing these characters within the context of their families and their communities. These accounts are also important because they explain why the three men left home to come to what is assumed to be the city of Bombay and also why the widow, Dina Dalal, whose older brother has a home there, is living alone, attempting to support herself.

The novel has focussed on the changes in Indian society from independence in 1947 to the Emergency called by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Rohinton Mistry criticized Indira Gandhi in the book. It is a fine piece of Indian literature and reflects several broad themes. The plot of the novel describes the National Emergency between two years 1975 and 1977 that takes up most of the plot. It resulted in most of the downtrodden forced to enter unhygienic sterilisation camps and exhibitionist rallies, evicted from their abodes as a part of slum demolition program being bullied by the police and ministers. The horrors of Emergency caused on socio-economic perspectives.

The second theme is related to the sensitive issue of caste and untouchability through the characters of Ishwar and Om. They belong from Schedule Caste particularly from cobbler community. These untouchables predominantly setup in the leather business and tanning animal hides. Ishwar's father, Dukhi, who he wanted to change their traditional business. But he had faced many challenges. It results in their destruction; villagers burnt their house more over Dukhi and his family died in the attack except of Ishwar and his nephew Om. We see the upper caste supremacists carried out atrocities one after the other on the untouchables and their families.

The third theme deals with ragging which is mostly occurs in school and colleges. The novelist has focussed on current issues in the Indian Society like caste system, ragging etc. Maneck is a student and is tortured by his peers and seniors. At first he faced ragging in boarding school and later on in college in Mumbai where they make him naked in the cafeteria freezer mercilessly.

The fourth important theme is related human trafficking for beggary. In these days most of the people wander as beggars particularly at Public places consisting of bus stop, railway station. Ishwar and Om starved and wandered to beg at railway platform. Shankar worm who has no limbs but merely a torso that he wheels around on a slab of wood with wheels to procure alms from sympathisers. The beggar master runs the business of beggary

and he recruits disabled beggars who can get him good money, takes care of them. And he put some of the share for himself.

The novel consists of few minor themes throughout the book like Parsis and their customs, family, corruption, helplessness, providence, togetherness, and suicide. It is the portrayal of current position of Indian society. The plot of the novel revolves around major character, particularly Dina. The first chapter of *A Fine Balance* is devoted to Dina, who was born Dina Shroff, the daughter of Parsi physician who marries with a good man with ideals to have earned much money or to have saved anything for the future. Nusswan was the brother of Dina, who is eleven years senior than her. He viewed his father with contempt; by the time he was sixteen. He had already decided start the business.

Dina wanted to become a doctor like her father and she was intelligent enough to fulfil her dream. The tragic incident took place in the life Dina, when Dr. Shroff died on one of his mission trips to a remote area and Nusswan took the charge of house and there was no question of further schooling. All hopes of Dina were came to an end she became the household drudge. She met and married Rustom Dalal, a pharmacist; they made a house together and were happy. However, on their third anniversary, an incident occurred which was worst, when her husband was run over and killed. Her brother was a tyrannical, so she cannot live with him. After the death of her husband she returns to Rustom's flat, started the business of tailoring and when her eyes begin to fail, she decided to find two tailors to work for her, though she must conceal them from the rent collector, since the flat is not supposed to be used by anyone. These two tailors became without shelter and both become beggars. After trapped by the rent collector, Dina loses her home and business; she has to return to her brother and live a life of drudgery. Maneck, too, abandons his dream. Having lost his faith in the human race, in life itself, he went to his village.

Narayan and Ishwar Darji were born in a rural village. As leatherworkers, their family belonged to lowest Hindu caste Chamaar, who traditionally do the leather work and identified as untouchables. And they were the prey of everyone from a higher caste. Ishvar's father was revolutionary who want to break caste system and determined to give a better life he apprentices his sons Ishvar and Narayan to, a kindly Muslim tailor Ashraf Chachain a nearby town, and so they became tailors. As a result they got the job in Bombay and then they opened clothing shop at nearby town.

In absence of Omprakash and Ishvar after attempting to vote independent of the local political leader, Thakur Dharamsi, a powerful upper caste village thug and his henchmen tortured and killed Narayan and his family is burned to death. However, Ishvar and Omprakash are only escaped from this attack because they lodged with Ashraf in the nearby town. Eventually the boys save tailor from rioting Hindus. Narayan returns to his village, sets up shop, marries, and has a son, Omprakash, who eventually goes to town to be Ishvar's apprentice.

At the beginning of the book, the two tailors, with their Muslim friend's business declining Ishvar and Omprakash are on their way to flat of the widow Dina Dalal by train and become her employees. They meet a college student, Maneck Kolhah, is the son of Dina's school friends who with her husband runs a profitable general store in the north of India. He is also living at same house. Maneck belongs to a small mountain village in northern India who came Bombay for acquiring a college certificate. Maneck was an intelligent boy After finishing college, he wants to return home and spend the rest of his life there. Maneck is learning a certificate program in refrigeration and air conditioning at the city college. He has trouble from filthy student housing and wants to go home. His parents arranged form him a rent room from Dina, who was his mother's school friend. The flat is not in good condition but he find a better alternative than the student hostel.

He liked Dina's house rather than college dormitory. In the beginning all goes well Dina's wholesaler accepts the garments that the tailors turn out and they find a slum where they can live and they seem to appreciate the kindness shown them by Dina and Maneck. However, Maneck and Om become friends both are from same age of 17. Ishvar helps like their father, while Dina helps like their mother. They have family bond though suffered in hardships and struggles. These four characters feel heavenly in Dina's apartment though there is political turmoil, abject poverty, squalid slums and government corruption in 1975 India. They meet to Dina and live in flat together, Dina hires Ishwar and Om for piece work, and is happy to let Maneck stay with her Parsi husband, who was a chemist. Maneck was psychologically affected by the appalling conditions how people live in the city. Dina worries about money and about meeting her weekly Au Revoir Exports quota. She is constantly harassed by the rent-collector and warned about operating a business in her flat. Dina told lie to rent collector that Om and Maneck are her sons and Ishwar is her husband at bay. In course of time they four become a family and in that context, the others forgive even Omprakash's periodic rebellions, as a family would the sullenness of a boy who is still young. These four

characters fall prey to ambitious and corrupt government officials who take cues from Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency.

The present novel is the backdrop of tragic events befalling the four protagonists, who despite the utter hopelessness and anxiety surrounding them, find comfort in each other's company. The story started when the emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi who was found guilty of cheating in the elections. Instead of resigning Prime Ministership, she twisted the law in her favour, turning against her opposition in a despotic effort to keep her throne. Most of the things were banned including public meetings and processions. However, opponents were thrown in jail without trial and street dwellers forced out of the city ruthlessly in the name of civic beautification and eradication of poverty, forced vasectomies and tubectomies in the name of birth control terrorizing the helpless poor.

The slum village where the tailors live is bulldozed. Then, just when Omprakash is about to return to his village to be married, he and his uncle are bused off to be forcibly sterilized. These two caste chammars turned tailors fleeing the oppression of their native village, go to the city for their share of fortunes, or misfortunes as they discover what fate has in store. The caste system forced these downtrodden in to city, the tailors did not choose to abandon their village of their own free will. They were victims of the caste system, by which upper castes thugs have driven the lives of the so called inferior castes to horrible ignominy. Limits of cruelty have passed by these village upper castes that brings by Mistry. These village upper castes did most horrible things to lower castes including hands chopped off, molten lead poured into ears, murder at the drop of a hat are commonplace. Traditional customs affected badly upon the mute downtrodden bearing extremely violent consequences in the hands of the goondas bred by upper castes. After returning to their village the tailors face new misfortunes. Om in anger spits at Thakur, the man who burned his family. Thakur planned to take revenge of the insult. However, Thakur heads the government's voluntary sterilization programme, he orders for people to be rounded up and random for the surgery. Ishwar and Om are pulled and Thakur arranges for Om to be castrated rather than just get a vasectomy. The pains and blood poisoning from his surgery needs to have his legs amputated.

As compared to United States like our caste system they have racism both equally cruel violating the rules of humanity. Illiteracy was the major factor in those days, so only

through complete literacy will the citizens be able to choose forthright leaders. It will be possible only the light of knowledge, dispel the hideous shadow of the caste system tormenting the nation for centuries. Atrocities through spineless bastards the country for power, playing one against another in their shameless show of selfishness. The caste system in India, caused as evil which makes many of its teeming millions stoop below animals. The unity is needed except of division on the name of religion and caste. Our country has been developing in science and technology and in all spheres. But the roots of caste system have deeply rooted and people undergo such discrimination every day and people who can commit such brazen crimes without fear of justice. Rural parts of India have deep practices of caste system in what way ourselves civilized knowing such barbaric prejudices in the hearts of so many of our people.

Maneck gets a job in Dubai and doesn't return until his father's death in 1984. In course of the time he has been unable to find any meaning in life. After returning to India, he has still appalled by the violence, tragedy and political turmoil. Maneck hopes that these two tailors and Dina are to be good condition. But he was shocked Dina living as a dependent in her brother's house. Her eye sight looks weak and appears old and tired. The tailors are now beggars, however, upon leaving Dina, Maneck meets Ishwar and Om on the street, but their ragged appearance shocks him so much that he doesn't acknowledge them. Maneck waited for a train to return his village in sorrow at all the losses his friends have suffered overwhelms him. He feels unhappy of his father's death seeing no reason to continue living, Maneck throws himself in front of an oncoming express train and commits suicide. Dina and two tailors have same attachment continue, she brings the tailors inside for lunch as usual, she feeds them whenever the rest of the family is out. They make fun with one another, recalling the old days. Dina repair the seat cushion which was given by Ishwar.

Ishwar and Omprash are victims of caste system and that can only be eradicated with more and more people like Dina and Maneck, who befriend with them. These four characters found in a cement bond driven by circumstances, they even share a common roof, connected with each other by kindness and love that which make us human. The horror of Emergency brings to the reader, the unsettling thought and confirmation, that for the marginal people. India does not require unintentional economic growth and sacrificing the poor-man at the altar of "Common Good". What it needs is, to bring impartiality, justice and the basic amenities to its unfortunate and rundown. "In the end, it's all a question of balance."

(A Fine Balance. 227) In the end, it is concluded that, even in the face of prejudice, greed, and hatred, people can survive hardships through loving ties with others.

### **Conclusion:**

Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* is the reflection of various themes which affect badly for the main protagonist in the novel. They have been struggling for their livelihood and fighting for gaining their rights. Caste system in India has destructed the lives of Narayan's family and the pressure of upper caste people on untouchables is a matter of debate. The effects of emergency caused upon the lives of people in India, they had lost their business and they get uneasy to maintain their routine life. We see that the middle class and the undesignated faceless working class feel sympathy for each other, and learn to overcome their prejudices and fictitious bonds of friendship, affection and compassion. However, the author does to inform as well as warn the readers that the horrors that follow the Characters in Mumbai are not local, but global for the deprived people.

The life of these characters is difficult, even cruel and opportunities are constrained by caste, gender, government corruption locally and across the country, and greed. The novelist shows the pasts of the characters with such a humanity so that is not possible to identify with them in some way. The characterization is beautifully drawn and in part because you want to read on quickly to discover how the characters will handle the challenges life throws at them. Mistry provides realistic picture of these characters at the violence, greed and lack of compassion that each character faces. The novel is filled with countless examples of ways, large and small, where the main characters and others help each other, with most generous sometimes being the characters with the least power and resources.

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