

## Thrust against Social Difference in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

**R. Kumara Balaji, Dr. V. Vimala, MA., M.Phil., Ph.D.,**

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Assistant Professor, Department of English, CPA College, Bodinayakanur.

kumarabalajirethinam@gmail.com

---

### ABSTRACT

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian-born Canadian writer and belongs to Parsi community. The novel, *A Fine Balance* (1995), won the second annual Giller Prize in 1995, and in 1996, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction. Also was selected for Oprah's Book Club in November 2001. In 1996 it won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and was shortlisted for the 1996 Booker prize. Rohinton Mistry as a social humanist, is provoked by the atrocities continued against the downtrodden and suffered people. It's no doubt that Rohinton Mistry strives hard to reform the society by exposing various problems of society like Mulkraj Anand. In short, Mistry desires peace to prevail in the society by understanding the various problems of individuals on the devastating effects of caste system on the social and economic status of downtrodden in Indian society.

**Keywords:** Humanist, Atrocities, Downtrodden, Caste System, Social, Economic Status.

*Article Received: 16th October, 2020; Article Revised: 30th December, 2020; Article Accepted: 08th January, 2021*

---

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is set up in Bombay between 1975 and 1984 during the Emergency period. It is a period of civil liberties. The writer focuses primarily on the major issues of India, the untouchability. In common, the term refers to a group of people who suffer due to economic, social and cultural discrimination in India. Rohinton Mistry bravely portrays the violence faced by oppressed people in the novel. His humanistic concern and sense of art reflects his thoughts of revolutionary. All forms of social evil practices of casteism oppressed the downtrodden people. Mistry has become a narrator of this revolution.

Socialism and humanism together form a manifesto for the welfare of the Indian society. Mistry's characters raise in self-knowledge and fight against the social issues to create a new world. His characters are young and middle age people. His

novels deal with major India social evils and differences in Indian society. *A Fine Balance*, the novel passes through a series of political events on many problems such as corruption, complexes and fragmentation of the social order. It replicates the reality of India's corruption, exploitation and oppression. His strong opposition to social discrimination has been expressed through this novel. Mistry depicts the violence committed on two untouchables from a village and oppression of the Parsi community. He focuses on four main characters and a few minor ones. The four characters have different stories of their own but they live together under one roof in the city. The novel clearly shows the agony of the poor people.

Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow struggles a lot to lead an independent life. Maneck Kohlah, a young man fights bravely against his problems in order to survive. The two untouchables named

Ishvar Darji and his nephew, Omprakash have worked under Dina as tailors. They are allowed to find refuge by the thought of friendship. Meanwhile, Mistry skillfully leads all the characters to contact each other and made them live together under the same roof. It's a wonder in the caste-ridden Indian society. Raymond says,

When I consider the realist tradition in fiction, I feel of the type of novel which creates and judges the standard of an entire way of life in terms of the qualities of persons. The balance involved during this achievement in perhaps the foremost important thing, the type of the items most novels do.... Yet the excellence of this type is that it offers a valuing of an entire way of life, a society that's larger than any of the individuals composing it, at an equivalent time valuing creation of citizenry who, while belonging to and suffering from and helping to define this manner of life, are also, in their own terms, absolute ends in themselves. (p 314).

The novel starts with the voice of the student Maneck Kohlah. He leaves his village to study in Bombay and stays as a boarder at Dina's house at Bombay. The two tailors Ishvar and Omprakash also come from their village due to caste violence and stays at the same Dina's home in Bombay. Likewise, the life of Maneck, Dina and the tailors Ishvar and Omprakash get interlinked together in the same house. Caste violence has driven Ishvar and Omprakash from their rural village and forced them to have a better life in congested Bombay. In the same way, Maneck also comes from his house in the hills to Bombay for his higher education. His family lost their wealth due to the partition of India. Dina is actually brought up in India. Due to her husband's accidental death, she stays away from her family. Social conditions and loneliness bring the four protagonists together and

fight for their survival and identity in the Indian society.

Ishvar and Omprakash have to bear the violence of the high-class people with their political power and thus their life become miserable. Because of the economic and social reasons, they have been uprooted from their world. After that, they become qualified tailors and come back to the village but with their conscious of the original roots in their society. When their family is brutally murdered by village lords, they made a decision to settle in Bombay for their survival. Similarly, Maneck is displaced. His father urges him to go to Bombay for a better education.

Ishvar and Narayan went back to the same city, where they are worked as tailors. After their apprenticeship gets over, Narayan goes to the village and becomes a political activist. His father warned him about the restrictions for the untouchables to participate in the political election process. In spite of his instructions, Narayan fights for the rights of untouchables. His views about life are "life without dignity is worthless" (A Fine Balance, p144). He grumbles about the pitiable conditions of untouchables. He fights against the corruption and discrimination of the parliamentary elections.

Dina wants to live alone from her relatives because she desires to maintain her individuality. She was born and brought up at the same city, Bombay but she is away from her family in the sense of individuality after her husband's death. She made up her mind to reform her life without being dependent on any one. Her life is full of poignant turmoil. Maneck is also a victim of dislocation because he is dislocated from his home to the city. He is always humiliated by his college mates. He struggles hard to get accustomed to the political atmosphere of the college but he feels estranged and commits suicide at last. Due to the

effects of the Emergency, Dina and Maneck's attempts have got failed. As a result, all the four characters are dislocated, lonely and searched for their identity and survival in the crucial world. Social conditions and loneliness bring them together to form a bond among them in order to lead their life. Mistry shows more interest towards untouchables because they are suppressed by the upper caste people and politicians. The lower caste people are tortured and killed by the political offences. Partha Chatterjee's comments on caste,

The essence of caste, we may say, requires that the labouring bodies of the impure castes be reproduced in order that they can be subordinated to the need to maintain the bodies of the pure castes in their state of purity. All injunctions of dharma must work to this end. (p 194)

As a social reformist, Mistry enthusiastically handles the problems of the villages, poverty, caste discrimination, intolerance and political disorders in Indian society. Due to the caste violence Omprakash and Ishvar lost their family and were dislocated to the city. It takes time to adapt to the city culture. They work as tailors to Dina but their thoughts do not match with hers. Especially, Om cannot fiddle with Dina's attitude. Dina does not accept the relationship between Maneck and tailors. Her attitude makes them to think that they are treated with caste-discrimination in the city life too. All the four characters strive hard to search their identity and survival.

Mistry tries to reflect and focuses on this kind of balance through his characters. In this novel, each character has some social problems to suffer. It is entirely different from his other novels. As David Selbourne has noted,

the conjunction of suffering, inflation and recession, and the cyclical collision of

mounting opposition from right, left and centre to the misgovernment of India and the draconian intolerance of such opposition began to deepen and quicken.

(Selbourne, 23)

This novel portrays vividly about the issues of present society. Mistry keenly deals with Indian culture and Parsi community in India.

## References

- [1] Ansari, Ameena Kazi. "Text/Sub text: Reading A Fine Balance." *Writers of Indian Diaspora: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Jasbir Jain: Rawat Publication, 1998.
- [2] Dr. Kumari, Reman. *Untouchability and Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance* A Publication of Trans Asian Research Journals AJMR, Vol.1 Issue 7, December 2012.
- [3] Juneja, OM.P. and Chandra Mohan. "A Literary Voyage to India: Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance." *Writers of Indian Diaspora Theory and Practice*, Rawat Publication, New Delhi: 1993.
- [4] Kapadia, N. The politics of survival and domination in a fine balance. In *The fiction of rohinton mistry: Critical studies*. London: Sangam. 1998.
- [5] Lawson, Guy. "A Fine Balance Review", *Maclean's* Vol-108(43), October 23, 1995.
- [6] Mistry, Rohinton.. *A Fine Balance*. First published 1995. London: Faber and Faber. 1997.
- [7] Novy Kapadia, "The Politics of Survival and Domination in A Fine Balance": A Reading of A Fine Balance, *The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry*, ed., Jaydipsingh Dodiya (New Delhi: Prestige, 1998) 127.
- [8] Selbourne, David. *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. 1977.
- [9] Vinita Dhondiyal Bhatnagar, "'And everything ends badly': A Reading of A Fine Balance." *The*

Fiction of Rohinton Mistry, ed., Jaydipsingh Dodiya (New Delhi: Prestige, 1998) 102.

[10] Williams, Raymond, *Realism and Contemporary Novel*, The Long Revolution. Harmondsworth Penguin: Book. 1984.