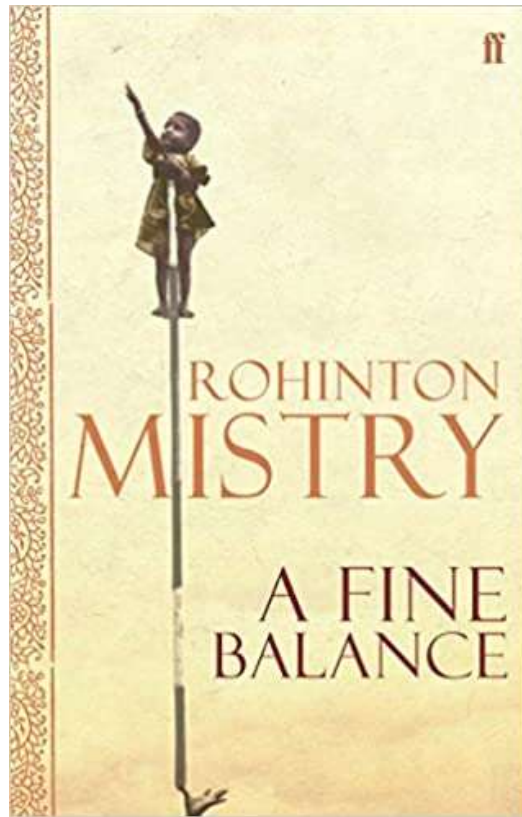


Socio-Cultural Transformation Propagates Novelty in Society and Culture: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Fine-Balance-Rohinton-Mistry-2006-10-19/dp/B017PNRAOS/ref=sr_1_3?crd=1C0CHSPNFR9HJ&dchild=1&keywords=a+fine+balance+by+rohinton+mistry&qid=1619637148&s=books&sprefix=A+fine+balance%2Caps%2C293&sr=1-3

Abstract

This article discusses the Class Hierarchy, Communal differences and Religious Bigotry as presented in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. Further, the origin and growth

of Diaspora in general and South Asian Diaspora are also discussed in this article. Peace and love among human beings can be attained only by accepting and accommodating multiculturalism within society.

Keywords: Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*, Multiculturalism, Diaspora, Religious and Caste Bigotry

Multiculturalism

Dictionary.com defines Multiculturalism as “the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation” (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/multiculturalism>). Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *multiculturalism* as “cultural pluralism or diversity (as within a society, an organization, or an educational institution): a multicultural social state or a doctrine or policy that promotes or advocates such a state.” The following quotes are provided to illustrate the use of the word *multiculturalism*:

“With racial and ethnic diversity increasing across the nation as a result of increased immigration, educational leaders were keen to embrace multiculturalism.

— Diane Ravitch

“Successful multiculturalism builds the bonds of community that lead to interracial, interethnic friendships.

— Diane Ravitch

“Multiculturalism is a term that has come to serve as shorthand for a host of different and not necessarily related cultural and educational issues. Arguments relating to gender studies, ethnic and racial studies, affirmative action, freedom of speech on campus, compromise and corruption among educational administrators have all been aired under the title, multiculturalism.

— A. E. Barnes”

Culture has reference to historical and geographical traditions. We can look at *Multiculturalism* as a “Social-ideal”. It could also be a ‘Political ideal’. Political-economic and cultural influences are identified in the multicultural world. Multiculturalism combines a sense of belonging with a claim to collective rights.

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is ethno-centric, but the content is multicultural one. Only the cultural difference makes *A Fine Balance* ethnicity-oriented. But there is acceptance of difference and this brings in multiculturalism.

India and Canada were two predominant colonies of the British Empire. One could look at Canadian and Indian writing in English as divided into two main phases, namely, the colonial and post-colonial. Rohinton Mistry deals with Indian life and culture in Canada of the post-colonial period. The themes revolve around Indian migrants to Canada.

Formative Influence on Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay on July 3, 1952. In 1975 he migrated to Canada. He worked a short time as a bank clerk. He earned a B.A. in 1982 at the University of Toronto, Canada. He lives in Brampton, Ontario and he is a full time writer. As a child, Mistry had read with avidity the books of Biggles and Enid Blyton. Bernard Malamud, Chekhov, James Joyce, Saul Bellow and Turgenev were the reputed writers who exercised a strong formative influence on Mistry's seminal mind.

Rohinton Mistry, as the post-independence Parsi writer in English, is ethno-centric and community-specific. He expresses the ethnic anxieties, the insecure social milieu, identity crisis, a nightmarish indomitable social crisis like the decline of Parsi population. Late marriages, low birth rate, high incidence of divorce, controversial attitude towards a girl child, the trials, and tribulations of urbanization and alienization are the major issues in Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance*.

Origin and Definition of Diaspora

The term *Diaspora* originally meant the disposal of Jews. Acquiring a new meaning, it is reinterpreted as *alienation, migration, marginalization* (or) *being in minority*. There are two phases of Diaspora, namely the old and new which suggests the migration of the indentured labour and the voluntary migration to a foreign land for brighter future respectively [2]. Rohinton Mistry's migration belongs to the second phase of the diaspora. Rohinton Mistry's Fiction *A Fine Balance* reveals the patterns of empowerment in a world that denies the individual voices.

South Asian Diaspora

The establishment of the South Asian Diaspora provides the identity to South Asian Writers including Rohinton Mistry. Since India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh people are clubbed as South Asians in Canada, Rohinton Mistry becomes a diasporic writer

of the South Asian origin in Canada like Uma Parameswaran, Michael Ondaatjee, Himani Banerjee, Yaswin Lada, Surjeet, Kalsey and others [3].

As a Parsi and then as an immigrant in Canada, he sees himself as a symbol of double displacement and this sense of displacement is a recurrent theme in his literary works. In his fiction *A Fine Balance*, Mistry portrays the atrocities happened to two “untouchables” from a village and two poor characters who belonged to Parsi community. The story in this fiction revolves around the small mobile widow living alone in the city of Bombay, Manech Kohlah, a refrigeration and cooling student from a hill side town in the shadow of the Himalayas, is the paying guest of Diana, and two “untouchables” Ishver Dariji and his nephew Omprakash are the tailors of Diana. They are the innocents crabbed in the smashing gears of history in *A Fine Balance*.

Violence against the other is one major response to the perceived threat of the loss of identity. In pre-colonial India Parsis were allowed to practice their ancient monotheistic religion but there was a price to pay for this freedom. They had to adopt the costumes, traditions, and language of their Hindu hosts. This shows the violence of power over the minority people’s ethnic identity [4].

At the same time, the disposal of coconuts and clay gods and goddesses by the Hindus, ashes of the sacred sandalwood fire, and the leftovers of the dead men by the Parsis in the Sea reflects the Indian cultural practices. This incidence supports multiculturalism whole heartedly.

Some Snapshots

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry highlights crucial events in the country’s chronicle by depicting the background of each protagonist. The lives of the tailors’ forefathers reflect the tyranny of the caste system in rural India where unimaginable horrors are perpetrated on the lower castes. Here is an illustration from the text.

The Thakur’s wife was watching from the kitchen window,
“Oiee, my husband! Come quick! She screamed. “The chamaar donkey has destroyed our mortar” ... “What have you done, you witless animal! Is this what I hired you For?” ... He hit Dukhi across the back with his stick. “Get up,” I said, And get out!” ... “Thakurji, have pity, there has been no Work for days, I don’t”. (AFB: 104)

The dastardly and heinous beatings and ill-treatment of Thakurji, which is inhuman, is portrayed in the above lines.

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The two rural untouchables are two of the thousands of displaced, hesitant struggling individuals who fight incessantly to secure a place in the maddening crowd of urban life. For votes and power, the corrupt leaders play with human lives and accept money from businessmen needing favours. For them,

“Passing Laws is like passing water, it all ends down the drain” (AFB: 143)

The most brutal aspect of Indian National Emergency (from 25 June 1975 until its withdrawal on 21 March 1977) was compulsory sterilization. Ration cards were issued only to those who had a family planning certificate and people had to choose between food and man/womanhood.

Mistry’s protagonists, Ishver and Om, too became victims of emergency. And Mistry gives a heart-rending account of their vasectomization, the removal of Om’s testicles just before his wedding and the amputation of Ishver’s legs, turning them into crippled beggars. Thus, they lost their ethnic identities and also their human identity.

Mistry comments on the superstitions Indian people have through a minor character named Rajaram. Rajaram is driven by extreme hunger. He becomes a barber / hair-collector, and then a family planning motivator, and finally a murderer, who kills two beggars for their lovely hair. He becomes the highly venerated BalBaba in a saffron robe. Superstitious Indian crowd waits in long queues for *dharshan* of this so-called holy man. He claims to predict the future for individuals.

“Bal Baba is very, very holy man,” said the attendant. He has returned to us after Many, many years of meditating in a Himalayan Cave” ... “Bal Baba has no charges, ... but all donations are mostly welcome by the “Bal Baba Foundation any much amount.” (AFB: 591)

Ironic in vision, brooding in tone, amorphous in realities, *A Fine Balance* should be read as an expression of the predicament of self in the Indian Urban / Rural context. In spite of the stark life that it represents, the novel reveals the understanding of moral purpose and a positive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns.

Conclusion

CBC (Canadian) Television special on multiculturalism in 1994 declared, “Multiculturalism” as being about “acceptance, accommodation and of course that most Canadian concept of all, Compromise”. In other words, we should accept, accommodate,

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and compromise with various kinds of people and their culture in the nation, and also the whole universe because the universe needs peace and love among human beings which can be attained only by accepting, accommodating and compromising with the help of multicultural society.

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