

## **Fiction and the Claims of Political: A Study of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance***

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### **Abstract**

1930s marked the rise of Indian English Fiction, initially in the hands of the "Big three" of Indian English literature, i.e. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan. Since its inception, it has been open to the claims of political. During 1930s and 40s, the impact of Gandhian nationalism and Nehruvian politics are redolent enough in the novels. But with the passage of time the political themes in Indian English fiction take a crucial turn towards more complexity. The fusion of political ideologies and individual self pervades Indian English fiction from 1950s onwards. The women novelists of 1950s like Anita Desai and Kamala Markandya, among many others portray the psychological aspects of women in an essentially patriarchal Indian society, whereas the novelists like Arun Joshi and others focus mainly on the tainted nature of postcolonial Indian Politics. But the novelists from 1980s onwards not only highlighted the prevalent corruption in Indian politics and society. Rather they brought to the fore the gaps and silences in these dominant political ideologies and how these dominant voices suppress the voices of the others.

The novels of Rohinton Mistry unmask the hypocrisies and oppressive nature of the dominant political ideologies and also aim at critiquing the homogenization of nationalism, cultural, historical, linguistic, and other traditions. Though he viewed Indian society from a diasporic lens but the victimization and exploitation of the parsis, who are minorities in Indian society and pangs in the lives of the people, belonging to the lower castes intensify his effort to draw satire on state machinery.

This paper intends to explore how Mistry has been critical against the dominant political ideologies of the postcolonial Indian society in his novel *A Fine Balance*. I would also like to study how the novelist delineates the sufferings of the marginalised people through the characters of Dina, Narayan, Ishvar, Omprakash, only to mention a few, during Emergency, which remain suppressed in the documented narratives under the façade of the concern of the elite classes for the people of India.

The relationship between fictional narrative and the 'claims of the political' is problematic. At one level, there is the politics of writing and at another level, the political discourse with its attendant aspects such as ideology, political alliance; democracy, free speech, domination and marginalization etc. entail a complex formation of the fictional. The interpretation of the 'political' as a discourse by theorists of different schools with its diverse implications establishes the fact that as much as the political, the fictional

also contributes to the production of social knowledge. A domain of knowledge is constituted by disparate and interrelated ways of theorization and interpretation. As a discourse, the political leaves a huge imprint on the production and naturalization of other disciplines like sociology, literature, philosophy and so on and simultaneously 'problematizes' their governing modalities. Since fiction among all other literary genres is the most impure one that incorporates the extra literary objects to a

large extent it tends to go beyond the conventional tenets of literature overtly being open to the claims of the political.

Among many theories of literary production and its interpretation starting with Aristotle till the modern, literature has been primarily considered from the perspective of its processes (imitation and inspiration), its functions (giving pleasure and teaching the universal human values) and its value (aesthetics and its modalities). It is Marxism that considers literary art as a social-material product thereby removing it from its illusive metaphysical/moral status. Marxist literary criticism considers literature as a political phenomenon by repudiating its value to be judged only on the sole criterion of aesthetics. A work of fiction tends to represent the reality imaginatively, thus fulfilling Nietzsche's concept of ambiguities and polysemies of reality and language, against the universal concept of truth.

Creative literature, like that of the political is also discursive in its formation. As writing, it is complicit in its own politics of power while speaking of/to truth. It is often accused of appropriating the thematic materials of other disciplines thus creating fictional horizons of truth. Thus the discipline of politics is not alone suspicious of literary products but as the subject matter of particular literary genre, it brings to bear upon particular versions of political assumption. As Jonathan Culler says in his book *Literary Theory: A very Short Introduction* (2000)

Literature is a paradoxical institution because to create literature is to write according to existing formulas—to produce something that looks like a sonnet or that follows the conventions of the novel—and it is also to flout those conventions, to go beyond them. Literature is an institution that lives by exposing and criticizing its own limits, by testing what will happen if one writes differently (40).

This understanding of Culler underlines the fact that literature is utterly “conventional” as well as “disruptive.” It is a complex phenomenon like politics, for its production is constitutive not only of what is internal to it but also what is external to it or, in other words, it exists besides itself. Following this formulation, we may accept the fact that the politics of writing is to state and restate whatever one agrees to or thinks to be the correct/ideal one or provides the space to counter some prevailing social order or system. If literature unravels human aspiration and desire to be human with all the contradictions of life and living under regimes and systems, there is also a strong will to protest whatever is unacceptable. If literary writing at various levels produces certain kind of ideology guided by political ideas it is also used as an instrument of propaganda to reinforce a particular political ideology. At the level of interpretation, the political aspect is pulled up in different directions as has been done let us say in Victorian/postcolonial fiction starting with a normal human story to ideologically loaded Marxist/left/ colonial/postcolonial/gender readings. Hence the political has been a foregrounding factor in literary production whether we read the texts in a particular way or otherwise.

By definition, a fiction *represents* the reality imaginatively; hence its claim to truth cannot be rationally justified. Literary works whether fictional or non-fictional have a special relation to the world or to borrow an expression from Said, a literary text is “worldly.” According to Said, discussed in his collection of essays, *The World, the text, and the critic* (1984) it is retrieved from its suspension and “actualized” to a presence only by the reader-critic. A text is thus subjected to a process of fulfillment, as its textuality is “enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society” (35). While the fictional

imaginary includes speakers, voices, actors, events and readers in its process of formation/fulfillment, it is not limited by them hence keeps open the question what a fiction is really all about? On the one hand, the fictionality of fiction is embedded in language, and on the other, it "separates language from other contexts in which it might be used and leaves the work's relation to the world open to interpretation" (Culler 32). Acknowledging that literature is foregrounded in language and is a rhetorical entombment, plural interpretations of a literary work underline the fact that it holds in its intertextual body other claims such as the political imaginary.

The political novel as a sub-genre has been prevalent from the time literary writing has started. Like historical novel, the political novel has centralized political events as its narrative focus.

Postcolonial studies crop up during the middle of the twentieth century, as a counter discourse to colonialism and its praxes. The emergence of postcolonial literatures from the former colonies witnesses a new form of literature, which is stylistically and thematically different from colonial literatures. The works of the pioneers of the postcolonial theory tend to embody this epistemic shift in diverse domains of knowledge. Thus postcolonial theory evolves mostly as a political discourse between the West and the rest.

Marxist criticism locates art within its social contexts, i.e. connecting it to the material realities of economics, class relations and power relations. Marxist theorists divide the very concept of production into two forms, i.e. 'base and superstructure'. Base refers mainly to the factors and relations of economic production, where the dominance of the capitalist class is redolent enough. Whereas Superstructure refers to the

cultural productions, i.e. law, religion, literature, art and lifestyles which indeed are determined by the economic base. So any work of art reflects certain ideologies, which in the case of mainstream art goes in favour of the ruling class. The complex nature of diverse modalities of interpretation of 'ideology' as a subject also unravels the intricacies and diverse forms of intersection between texts and various forms of political ideologies. Terry Eagleton has defined ideology as "those ideas and beliefs which help to legitimize the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation" (Eagleton 29). For Althusser, it is the system of ideas which dominate the mind of a man or a group. Ideology prevents the recognition of the oppression by the oppressed by creating a veil of apparent compatibility in the existing system. Hence, Marx termed it 'false consciousness'. Althusser states that ideology works through particular structures in society which are called 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISAs) (Althusser 127-188). When the state imposes an ideology through the threat of sanctioned violence (the police, law, army etc), it is called the coercive mode of ideology dissemination. On the other hand, when it works through convincing the people to accept it, it is called the consent mode of ideology dissemination. He notes that art not only exists within the dominant ideologies but also remains at a distance from them. When a particular work distances from dominant ideologies it contains traces of subcultural resistance. This distancing from the dominant ideologies and the epistemic shift from the governing modalities of mainstream writings are reminiscent of Foucault's concept of 'Archeology'.

Foucault argues that Archeology is about probing the discursive traces and orders left by the past in order to write the "history of the present" (qtd. in Roth 32-46). It looks at history

as a process that governs our existence. It never seeks to consider the continuous, chronological progress of history. Rather it endeavors to capture how disparate discourses function by their own rules and strategies, whose relation to each other is disjunctive and discontinuous. So in a way Archeology looks at the gaps and silences in the documented historical narratives. What he suggests can be construed both as counter-history and social critique. It is considered to be counter-history since it opts for a contrapuntal reading of traditional history whose inferences it tends to rearrange rather than defying it entirely. Archeology can also be viewed as social critique as it tends to open up diverse ways of rendition having the possibility of change through radicalization of our perception about the contingency of our deep seated biases and various social norms and values.

Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism consider a literary text which not only reflects an age's material condition and contexts, but shapes those contexts by persuading the people to accept certain beliefs and opinions. According to them, any cultural production works through certain discourses and reflects certain ideologies where power works through insidious forms and inspires people to adopt to the interests and beliefs of the dominant classes. This power relation works in different contexts like race, class, gender etc. Unlike New Historicism, Cultural Materialists prefer to study the present concerns in historical light. Cultural materialists like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (1992) formulate a concept called 'dissident reading', i.e. an attempt to find out the subcultural resistance, counter cultural modes and dissidence in literary texts to interrogate dominant ideologies. But on the other hand, one of the pioneers of New Historicism Stephen Greenblatt (1980) states that whenever resistance becomes redolent enough in any social structure,

the dominant classes co opt it by providing a legitimate outlet for resistance and anger so that they could retain their power.

Feminist criticism also focuses on the dominant patriarchal ideologies in the society that naturalizes the gender roles of women thereby privileging man's superiority. Thus the politics of patriarchal ideology, according to Judith Butler (1990), subordinates the female subject to a fixed position. Butler, one of the participants in the third wave feminism or postmodern feminism, contests the notion of a stable gender role in proleptizing spatial and temporal dimensions in gender relation. She coins a new term called 'performative construct' to conceptualize the idea of gender. She considers gender as a role or performance enacted by the individuals, which is largely centered on the location, time, socio-political contexts and cultural frameworks, which in a way determine the role played by men and women. Thus the tradition of specific gender roles for men and women evolve from the repetition of roles played by them, which is subject to negotiation and alteration. With the change in contexts and parameters, the governing modalities of gender roles are also exposed to alteration. Thus in her path breaking work *Gender Trouble* (1990), she aptly argues that "Identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (24-25). The parameters of analyzing 'gender performativity' which is largely centered on diverse socio-political and cultural contexts are further contextualized by the postcolonial feminists while theorizing the diversity of experiences of third world women and determining the modalities of looking at the tenets of feminism from a postcolonial lens.

These theoretical approaches in case of Marxism locating a literary text with ideological underpinning, in case of Foucault contextualizing

history and its many gaps in terms of power-authority relationship and empowering the author with agency, in case of New Historicists and Cultural materialists considering the material conditions and their contexts in trying to unravel the socio-political power-relations in narratives including literature and feminists situating literary writing as a patriarchal phenomenon, we come to diverse ways of viewing literature as a discursive practice.

Following some of the threads of the above mentioned theoretical postulates, it appears that literature is willy-nilly political in various guises and under different discourses. In this context, the present study makes an attempt to situate and examine Rohinton Mistry's works with reference to *A Fine Balance* (1995) as a political novel that contextualizes postcolonial India's political history. Mistry's discontent with totalizing historical knowledge in terms of attempts towards homogenization in the Indian context has resulted in fictional narrative that is filled with pungent satire of absolute power with complete disregard to democracy and will of people. Mistry's narrative is pinned on a soul searching effort to understand India and its various contradictions. It therefore obtains that an examination of his assumptions vis-à-vis the reality of India is required through a critical reading of his above mentioned texts. Mistry's texts weave multiple narratives of people and characters starting with the silent masses to those who fight for the values of a democratic polity to those who trample over those values. History of postcolonial India opens up to many contested assumptions where the political makes attempts to rewrite narratives of multiple forms of victimization bringing out the discursive traces of heterogeneity of experiences, in particular, of minorities mostly Parsis and other relegated lots. In the process, Mistry has contributed to the formation of subaltern forms of nationalism,

alternate modalities of power and property relations, histories and cultural traditions.

Mistry's second novel *A Fine Balance* (1995) is a landmark fictional work of Mistry. The novel spans over forty years since Indian Independence. It is directly linked to exploitation of common people, minorities, people belonging to the lower strata of the Indian society, women among many others in colonial as well as postcolonial India. Rohinton Mistry who left India in 1975 tries to repossess the socio-political history of India with diasporic consciousness. Just like other expatriate writers he has also to face what Salman Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands* "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (Rushdie, 11). *A Fine Balance* thus does not present an optimistic picture of India; rather the pessimistic image of Mistry's lost motherland is poignant enough.

Starting with colonial India and moving on to the threshold of Indian Independence, Mistry presents a sordid picture of caste discrimination and the harrowing impact of it on the untouchables. The Chamaars faced the violence of the caste system to a great extent, where humiliation and forbearance was their constant companion. Budhhu's wife refused to go to the field with Zamindar's son. As a consequence, she was shaved off and was compelled to walk naked through the square. Dukhi's wife was raped in the orchard of the Zamindar by the night guard for stealing fruit to feed her own children. In the village, the untouchables were denied of education, which comes to the fore when Ishvar and Narayan were beaten mercilessly for entering the classroom. Besides that their fundamental rights were also at stake. Rohinton Mistry has been highly critical against the oppression of the untouchables and portrays a painful life of misery of the untouchables. It is

evident enough in the experience of Narayan, when he assertively claimed for his right to vote. Narayan and his companions were caned mercilessly and were hung naked from the branches of a banyan tree and Thakur Dharamsi's men

Urinated on the three inverted faces. Semiconscious the perched mouths were grateful for the moisture; licking the trickle with feeble urgency... burning coals were held to the three men's genitals, then stifled into their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village until their lips and tongues melted away (146).

Later their bodies were displayed in the village square and Narayan's house was set ablaze and his entire family was burnt alive. Through this sordid picture, Rohinton Mistry has deftly brought forth the inhumanity and the prevailing injustice in Indian Society.

After independence, people like Babu Dharamsi rose to power in the newly elected government and became a menace for the lower caste people. The social oppression was so immense that the untouchables were scared of their security. This is evident enough in the case of Dukhi, when he became the father of two sons. He feared for his family's safety and sent his sons to Ashraf, his friend to learn tailoring, so that they get out of the caste stereotypes. This portrayal of social oppression and the deprivation of the minorities and the impoverished from their fundamental rights bring to the fore the fissures in Indian socio-political discourse.

*A Fine Balance* presents a unique fusion of the personal and the political. It showcases the lives of the individuals in different historical and political contexts. The communal riot between Hindus and Muslims on the eve of India's independence is not only shown as mere incident, but it underlines the mistrust and animosity between two communities in post-

independent India. As most of the riots are engineered and manipulated in India, it ironically always works to the advantage of the privileged at the cost of many innocent lives being sacrificed. No one is held responsible and it appears that the state abandons its responsibility as well. Mistry's critique of abandoning responsibility on the part of the state is more pointed as he champions the cause of the down trodden. As a sensitive novelist, Mistry eulogies characters who uphold human dignity in the mayhem resulting in human bonding and personal relationship that prevails over the political. This is evident enough when Ashraf Chacha and his family are saved from the hands of a group of Hindu ruffians by the discretion of Ishvar and Narayan. Another bout of communal riots crop up after the assassination of Indira Gandhi when the Sikhs were mercilessly murdered. Maneck, who was completely oblivious of the ongoing political turmoil in India, was requested by a taxi driver to shave off his beard, after returning from Middle East. He was advised to do so in order to escape the wrath of the public. These sordid details of innumerable miseries and ceaseless anxiety in the lives of the people confront the tenuous nature of Indian republic as a democracy.

Among many problems that plague the Indian society, Rohinton Mistry is mostly concerned in *A Fine Balance* with several negative effects of "The Emergency" that was imposed by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1975. The Emergency in India has brought so many changes in the lives of the people of India. The people of the country were denied of their fundamental rights and faced with such majors as forced sterilization, lost their homes because of destruction of slums and in certain parts of India, in the name of beautification programme without any proper arrangement for their rehabilitation. Detention of people by the police

without charge and moreover by the enactment of the illegal laws also resulted in certain changes in Indian Constitution.

Rohinton Mistry has been highly critical of the steps taken by the government during the emergency and has deftly satirized those acts in his novel *A Fine Balance*. Here Mistry throws light on the suffering and victimization of people from various sections of the society. He also attempts to unmask the hypocrisies of the dominant socio-political ideologies which surreptitiously mask those social injustices and inequalities under the façade of development, beggar eradication programme, maintenance of internal security and so on.

Rohinton Mistry has confined himself to explore the vulnerable conditions of the underprivileged sections of Indian society more seminally of Mumbai and its suburbs. Mistry emphasizes the fact that in postcolonial India, the plight of the common people has not ameliorated, rather it has worsened. The postcolonial rulers of India have entirely failed to resolve the problems of poverty, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy and disease. That's why one of the characters in the novel aptly says, "of course, for ordinary people nothing has changed" (581). In postcolonial India, the dominance of the British is replaced with that of the native elite class, where the minorities and the marginalized people continue to live in abject poverty. This novel attempts to rediscover those suppressed voices which are long forgotten and ignored. The divide between the rich and the poor has widened in the course of time. With the unfolding of the story the sordid picture of half naked people of Bombay slums, with their meager possessions, the hungry rickety children, whom the parents fed with "half rotten bananas and oranges and scraps" (330) recur again and again. The

desiccated existence of these people is further explored with the delineation of a woman who

Outside the platform...sat in the sun... drying her laundered sari, one half out a time. One end was wound wet round her waist and over her shrunken breasts, as far as it would go. The drying half was stretched along the railway fence (281).

The misery of existence of these people again and again challenges the very notion of equality and democracy. They are not only divested from their fundamental rights, but can't even afford themselves with enough food and a place to live. These uneducated lots are oblivious of their rights and the corrupt officials take advantage of their ignorance. When the shantytown where Ishvar and Om lived was demolished under the Government beautification programme during emergency, they were compelled to stay on the railway platform. But soon after the "midnight they were awakened from their sleep by a railway policeman kicking at the trunk. He said sleeping on the platform was prohibited" (300). After inquiring from the policeman about others who were sleeping on the platform the policeman says, "they have special permission. The policeman jingled the coins in his pocket" (300). Later, the woman who was lying next to them clarifies that they have to pay him for a place on the platform to sleep. She also mocked at the very act of the government officials. "Cinema, cinema! she pointed excitedly at the film poster lining the platform wall. One rupee per beggar. Fifty paisa for child. Cinema every night" (300).

The impoverished lot cannot raise their voice against the prevailing corruption. They are convinced as well as coerced by the dominant socio-political ideologies to stay contented with the existing social system. By seeking to rediscover the long suppressed voices, Mistry

makes an attempt to look at Indian history from the perspective of those marginalized people, which is long suppressed in the documented historical narratives. When he went back to Canada, he told Hancock that Bombay appears to him to be very grim and bleak, "Bleak was the picture I created when I was here. That's exactly the way it is" (148).

Mistry "finds Bombay oppressive and overcrowded" (Cyrus Mistry 11). In Bombay, people like Ishvar, Omprakash, Rajaram among many others who live in below poverty line don't even find a suitable place to live and are compelled to live in the unhygienic atmosphere of overcrowded slums. The unhygienic open air lavatory, the problem of getting portable drinking water and the inability of the poor to satisfy their hunger become dominant issues in the novel. Eight, nine or ten people live in a small room. They sleep one over the other on big shelves, from floor to ceiling, like third class railway berths, or in cupboards or in bathrooms: "Surviving like goods in a ware house" (471). These squalid pictures of their relentless suffering throw light on the failure of Indian Government and the inequalitarian social system.

The suffering of common people during the time of "Emergency" is terrible in comparison to their other sufferings in this novel. Mistry delineates events of Emergency as they play out in the lives of the slum dwellers of Bombay. The migrants like Ishvar and Omprakash come to Bombay seeking jobs. Rajaram, another migrant says: "thousands and thousands are coming to the city because of bad times in their native place" (171). But in the course of the novel it becomes evident that "the city grabs you, sinks its claws into you and refuses to let go" (172). When Ishvar and Omprakash go to a government office for ration card and seek help from a person called Facilitator, who acts as the middleman between

the government officials and the people, he simply asks for their Family Planning Certificate, without it a ration card cannot be issued. Even their right to get a ration card has to be exchanged with their castrated manhood in exchange: "All we wanted was a ration card, Mr. Facilitator. And the fellow wanted our manhood in exchange! What kind of choice is that between food and manhood?" (178). Initially the Facilitator tries to convince them to go through primary vasectomy, and they would be rewarded with two transistor radios. In spite of the allurements what is significant is how the writ of Sanjay Gandhi was the law during Emergency hence the enforced family planning whether one wants it or not. The irony of the matter is that even persons who are not married were forced to go through the process and in this context the people living in slums were the most vulnerable.

This vulnerable section it seems did not enjoy any rights even they could be forced to attend Prime Minister and other Ministers political meetings. During emergency the police was most active as it enjoyed unlimited power. The police would huddle up the people from the Jhopadpattis to attend the meeting of the Prime Minister or they could be punished: "Two people from each jhopdi must get on the bus- no delay. Otherwise you will be arrested for trespassing on municipal property" (259)! Police intervention in the daily life of the people living in the slums of Bombay becomes most acute during the time of Emergency. It became the most oppressive force. The suppression of the voices of these people clearly questions the notion of democracy in India. But the social oppression and the victimization of common people and those belonging to the lower strata of the society reach its culmination when they were lured as well as forced to go through primary vasectomy under the family planning programme during



Emergency. An old man, lured by the attractive gifts goes through the primary vasectomy and later writhes in pain as the operation became septic because of the carelessness of the doctors.

But the pain that is inflicted on Ishvar and Om outdoes all other sufferings. They went to their native place in search of a bride for Om. While coming back from the market they come across a group of ruffians who force people to get into the truck to take them to the family planning centre. In this commotion Ashraf Chacha dies. Babu Dharamsi, who is now a Congress leader orders the doctor to go for a permanent sterilization of Ishvar and Omprakash to take revenge on them as Omprakash once spat in front of him out of sheer indignation of seeing him after a long time. Babu Dharamsi sticks to his decision despite the objection from the doctor. Due to this both of them become physically handicapped and Ishvar's leg was amputated to restrain the infection from spreading to his entire body. Om ends up being an impotent and Ishvar a cripple. Their future lives were shattered and finally they end up as beggars. The harrowing impact of family planning programme on the lives of innocent individuals unveils the mask of cruelty of the political class that is packaged under the very façade of benevolence.

These sordid pictures of sufferings and the social oppression bring to the fore how people were denied of their fundamental rights during the time of emergency. Mistry has depicted how people were rendered homeless under Govt.'s beautification programme and the homeless were taken to a government beggar eradication camp in a truck where they were put by the supervisors to hard work. But during the emergency the corrupt officials prospered as they swindle the government fund in various ways be it family planning or providing bad food. The place where these people were brought

to turned to hell: "By the end of the first week, Ishvar and Om felt they have spent an eternity in this hell" (358). As Morey maintains: "The bodily distress of characters appears also of that of the city they inhabit—and perhaps, of the body politic more generally..." (*Rohinton Mistry* 102).

The novel also showcases other forms of exploitation. During partition Maneck's father Farokh loses most of his property. Later with the advent of globalization and rapid growth of industrialization in late capitalist era, the small businesses suffer huge loss. Farokh Kohlah's cola shop almost closes down due to the cheap cost of other soft drinks, which started to flourish with the advent of Globalisation. The novel aptly addresses the propensity of the dominant capitalist ideologies to wipe out the existence of the economically weak: "Representatives approached him with a proposition: 'Pack up your machines, sign over all rights to Kohlah's Cola, and be an agent for our brand. Come grow with us, and prosper'" (220).

The novel also showcases resistance from Mr. Kohlah who refuses to cringe to this corporate venture as "...for him it was not merely a business decision but a question of family name and honour" (220). But the multinational capitalist companies with their much organized endeavor and with the help of abundant capital pervade the entire region, which not only resulted in the decline of the family business of Kohlah but also turns him into a psychopath. In a similar vein, Ashraf Chacha's tailoring shop fails to compete with the cheap readymade dresses. The vulnerability and insecurity in the lives of Farokh and Ashraf exemplify the plight and the huge loss suffered by the small businessmen in this late capitalist era or the era of neocolonization. Neo-colonialism never attempts to stabilize the local entrepreneurship instead it colonizes the citizens ideologically

through diverse scales of social, economic and cultural domination. The neocolonial era witnesses the rise of metropolitan cities, shopping malls and resulting in cultural crisis due to the hybridization of native cultures in creating a new elitist section in the society. Thus in postcolonial India the poor remain perpetually poor and the rich flourish at their cost.

The sharp downfall of small businesses evinces the game the political class plays. The graphic portrayal of the exploitation of this class by the bigger industries underlines the class division following Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's revolutionary thesis in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848):

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society... All fixed, and first-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify... The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed (*Manifesto*38).

Rohinton Mistry's heart lies with the Marxist ideology as he tries to bring out the perennially unheeded traces of pain and exploitation of the muted sections of the society so that his critique of the idealistic notions like nationalism, national culture puts them as hollow. The project of nationalism and certain idealistic concepts like 'unity in diversity' and so on propounded by the nationalist leaders during the time of India's independence with the passage of time not only fail to recognize the multiplicities of experiences of different sections of the society and relegate

the heterogeneity of the experiences from the lower strata of the society while patronizing the rise of capitalism. Such a move strengthens the dominant social forces to eradicate the ideological antagonisms between classes by putting up a veil of uplifting the economic condition of these silenced groups of the society, rather than enlightening and elevating them politically and socially that maintains a stark affinity with the formulation of the idea of 'Bourgeois Socialism':

The socialistic bourgeois...desire the existing state of society, minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat... it but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie... this socialism sought to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class by showing that no mere political reform, but only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economical relations, could be of any advantage to them (*Manifesto*76-77).

The minute details of exploitation and victimization of people reverberate Mistry's attempt to satirize the dominant ideologies. He attempts to unmask the hypocrisies of the dominant socio-political ideologies, which lays underneath the so called people friendly activities. Mistry goes deep into the very core of Indian society to study how ideologies function in a very conniving way, which goes beyond the reach of common people and how they are deceived by those dominant ideologies.

But the few traces of resistance crops up sporadically with the course of the novel. Mistry's scathing criticism of "the Emergency" is reflective of the fact when he satirizes the prime minister's meeting during emergency as "a day

in circus". He also shows how the people who hold the power in the government are too ignorant about the torture and ignominy of the people: "I wonder if the Prime Minister knows they are forcing us, said Ishvar. She only knows important things, said Rajaram. Things her friends want her to know" (259). Such a conversation reflects the fact that the Prime Minister is totally cut off from what is happening on the ground. It is her son Sanjay Gandhi with his "20point programme" to rejuvenate the country has hijacked the Govt. policies in implementing them in the wrong way. Mistry in a way attempts to articulate an ideological resistance to Sanjay Gandhi's agenda. The junior Gandhi's agenda has led to an absolutist nationalist narrative. Such a narrative also echoes the statement by the Congress President Devkanta Barua that "Indira is India."

The novel also addresses several spatial and temporal dimensions of gender segregation in third world countries, and more seminally in India. The problems faced by women in third world countries, those from the lower strata of the society and from the remote regions of the country differ from the governing modalities of feminism, postulated by the first world feminist intellectuals. There is a paradoxical situation where the country is deified as motherland in a way signifying the land as female and giving it an iconic status on the having atrocities against women. Nationalism that is invoked in the name of the motherland is also subverted by the very act of women's subjugation. Thus this gendered form of nationalism is governed by the dominant patriarchal ideology. This ideology was also endorsed by women, who partook in anti-colonial struggle, which in turn strengthened the stance of patriarchy. This connivance of patriarchy is aptly highlighted by Partha Chatterjee in his book *The Nation and its fragments* (1993):

Women from the new middle class in nineteenth-century India thus became active agents in the nationalist project-complicit in the framing of its hegemonic strategies as much as they were resistant to them because of their subordination under the new forms of patriarchy (Chatterjee 148).

This patriarchal Indian social system always naturalizes the subjugation of women thereby suppressing the voices of women. After the death of Dina's father Nusswan, her brother ill-treats her by not allowing her to meet her friends and he also compels her to do the household chores even she is expected to polish his shoes. After the death of Mrs. Shroff, Dina was not even allowed to pursue her education. She was not even permitted to matriculate. Despite the torture she asserts her individuality and marries a medical representative Rustom Dalal making her own choice, thus shattering her brother's expectation. But this assertion of self identity and courage to lead her life according to her own terms reach its culmination after the death of her husband. After the death, she strives hard to lead an independent life and decides to stay back in her husband's rented apartment. She has to overcome several obstacles starting with the house owner and the ruffians, which also includes the proposal of remarriage by her elder brother Nusswan.

Thus Dina's resistance to the dominant patriarchal system and her attempt to acquire economic independence by taking up assignments from Au-Revoir export exemplify her struggle to keep her individual autonomy. Lois West argues that women should claim for equal rights, better work conditions so that they can safeguard independent cultural and economic rights through identity-rights movement. This eventually may prompt them to

constitute alternative forms of nationalism based on the heterogeneity of their experiences.

This possibility of alternate form of feminist nationalism is aptly rendered through the metaphor of 'quilt', which she conscientiously sews with the residual pieces of clothes used by Ishvar and Om. This act semantically strengthens the argument that there is a possibility that the marginalized groups can come together in providing an alternative concept of the nation. The metaphor of quilt represents Nira Yuval-Davis's argument on nationalism in her book *Gender and Nation* (1997). She argues for women's solidarity coming from different socio-political and cultural backgrounds based on some common interests like 'equal rights for women'. But at the same time it should not thwart one's own position, individual and community identity and should enable them to retain the differences in terms of their culture, language and other forms of practices. The different parts of the quilt may also imply Mistry's most coveted propensity to bring to the fore the traces of heterogeneity so that to propose an alternative history of the nation.

This history should record their experience of varying forms of subordination, and of resistance, their attempts to cope with changing forms of material and ideological life both in their everyday experience and in those flashes of open rebellion, must leave their imprint on consciousness as a process of learning and development" (Chatterjee, ed. Chaturvedi 21).

There are also other instances of gender discrimination and the ignominy faced by women in Indian society. When a son was born to Radha and Narayan, sweets were distributed and everyone from the community celebrated with them. But when daughters were born to them, no sweets were distributed. When Shankar's mother was born, her drunken father

slashed off her nose in a fit of drunken fury and he was disappointed with his wife for giving birth to a daughter instead of a son. Avinash's father was dejected because of his failure to afford dowries for his three daughters. Finally, they committed suicide by hanging from the ceiling fan to get rid of the ignominy and to spare their parents from further shame of three unmarried daughters.

Thus the pain, inflicted on women's body and the spatial context of third world women and more seminally the women from the underprivileged sections of Indian society bring it closer to the conceptualization of the 'Subaltern' by Gayatri Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985). She adopts the term 'subaltern' from Antonio Gramsci's formulation of subaltern theory to imply the suppressed lots in the society and attempts to theorize the plight of native people due to colonization and most imperatively the third world women. Here she unravels the threefold domination of third world women, i.e. racial, patriarchal and subjugation by first world feminists.

These diverse spatial and temporal scales of domination in a way prevent them from expressing their own voices, and they are deliberately being spoken off by others. She refuses to conform to the conventional notion of the inability of the third world women to speak for themselves, to validate the propensity of others to speak on behalf of them and hence she urges them to enunciate the pangs in their life in order to break free the shackles of diverse forms of domination. She also argues that the subaltern prefer to write their own body, since they don't have any other way to express their true stories. It is the body that suffers the most hence it is the body that needs to be written about.

Though Mistry focuses on the injustices meted to and subjugation of women and comes up with some sort of resistance to male domination in the final reckoning, it appears that, they are compelled to cringe before the system. This is aptly manifested in the experience of Dina, who finally goes back to her brother's house after so many struggles to live a life of her own. So all resistances end up in despair and utter frustration and eventually the dominant social forces prevail over the marginalized ones.

So politics as a theme is central in *A Fine Balance* that oscillates between the dominant sociopolitical ideologies and the victimization of the common people and minorities. Resistances to dominant forces have remained muted and even if voiced those voices are muffled by the dominant system. In this text, like his other works, Mistry has demonstrated deftly the corrupt and hollow Indian Democracy that supports the privileged class and the voices of the others remain perennially unheeded. Rohinton Mistry brings into light those long suppressed voices challenging the official Indian history. Although Mistry envisions a different egalitarian social order, his work ends up with a pessimistic note.

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