

Pathetic Conditions of Women in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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Abstract – Rohinton Mistry is an outstanding Indian-born Canadian novelist who always attempts to expose the misfortunes, oppression, and endless sufferings of women in India after Independence. In his second novel, *A Fine Balance*, Mistry has portrayed the predicament of marginalised women. Women are subjected to feel like slaves as they don't have their own identity. They are tortured in the house as well as outside the house. The protagonist, Dina Dalal, strives to be an independent woman after facing a lot of violence at home. Her troubles never meet with an end and she becomes an independent individual as she runs a tailoring business. There are many other pitiable characters such as Leela, Roopa, Mrs., Gupta, and Ruby in the novel and their everlasting struggle for survival is made to study. Like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa and Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry deftly exposes the hypocrisy and double standard of the male dominated society of Independent India.

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A Fine Balance is a fascinating novel written by Rohinton Mistry in a beautiful way. Published in 1995, it is Mistry's second novel. Shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1996, the novel is considered to be the actual portrait of contemporary India during the Emergency period imposed by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The novelist has portrayed the sufferings and problems of marginalised section of Indian society especially Parsi women and untouchables. Rohinton Mistry is a well-known author for depicting the pathetic conditions of women of post-independence India and he knows the pros and cons of Indian politics. Having taken the real events in the novel, he historicises them in a unique way. The story reflects the reality of India, the politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, violence and bloodshed. Women, in the novel, suffer a lot due to the misappropriation of the system and the attitude of male dominated society.

Rohinton Mistry brings to light the horrible conditions of marginalised women through a Parsi woman named Dina Dalal living India at the time of the declaration of Emergency in 1975. Dina Dalal suffers a lot due to Internal of Emergency and she struggles for her survival. She becomes an independent individual to some extent but her journey is not so easy. She loses her flat and is forced to live with her brother. Her brother treats her like a servant and their pure relationship ends there. This is the condition of women after the death of their husbands. If some women want to become independent, they are forbidden to do so. A number of women become slaves to their brother or their family when they do

not have any alternate of earning. Through the character of Dina Dalal, Mistry unmasks the true characters of males who pretend to be the caretakers of women.

Rohinton Mistry reveals the fact that women have been placed after men in the field of education. There are a number of women who leave their study due to negative attitude of male members in the family. Education is an important aspect in one's life if one has to succeed in life. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* writes that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of women and the true nature of fiction unresolved." (29) Dina Dalal wants to pursue her study but she is made to do household chores. Nusswan, her brother, decides that there is nothing in Dina's matriculating. He comments only, "But the fact remains that your results are hopeless, I 'm going not to waste money on school fees for another year." (26) When Dina demands her right, she is made to keep quiet. This is what Mistry expresses that the future of women is determined by male members of the family. No one cares for what really a woman needs. What men decide is inevitable. This anti-feministic attitude of her family destroys the career of Dina Dalal as she wants to be a renowned doctor like her father.

A Fine Balance is a painful saga of the sufferings of women. Throughout history, women have been facing a lot of violence in the family. They face

physical, verbal, and psychological violence. Mistry reflects the violence faced by women through the female characters and the worst sufferer of it is Dina Dalal. Nusswan, after the death of his father, ill-treats Dina and he orders her to keep quiet. Dina Dayal changes her hairstyle without the permission of her brother and Nusswan can-not bear this disobedience and slaps her badly. He says, "Don't question me when I ask you something." (23) The instance of verbal violence can be traced when Nusswan criticises Dina for not obeying his decision after the death of her husband. It is clear when Nusswan says, "Shameless woman! What a loose mouth! Such blasphemy! All I am saying is, appreciate your position. For you it is possible to live a full life, get married again, have children. Or do you prefer to live forever on my charity?" (52)

The patriarchal system has been the root cause of gender inequality in India and women's exploitation has been the old age cultural phenomenon of Indian society. Simone de Beauvoir remarks in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." (14) Not only the lower caste women, but also the upper caste women are subjected to face the torture of people's oppression. Women are brutally beaten by their husbands when they give birth to girls and girls are never welcome to the society. There is no celebration at the time of their birth. On the other hand, at the birth of a male baby, there is a grand celebration. Sweets are distributed to the neighbours to celebrate the occasion. There has been a prejudiced idea that girls bring a lot of trouble to the family and their life is always full of sufferings and pain inside the house as well as outside the house. Keeping this prejudice in their mind, some women have to murder the innocent babies.

Rohinton Mistry has beautifully raised the issue of marriage in *A Fine Balance*. The decision of marriage also creates problems for women. Women are never asked to choose their husbands according to their own will or choice. Their marriage is fixed by the male members of the family. Women have to face psychological trauma due to their passive participation in their marriage. The issue of early marriage is brought into light with the marriage of Roopa and Dukhi. Roopa is married to Dukhi when she is at 14. She gives birth to three children during their six months together. Unfortunately all die within a month. Early marriage causes physical problems to women. Women, like Roopa, have to follow the social codes drafted by male dominated society. Widow women also have their own sufferings. They are pressurised to get married again as the family wants to get free from its responsibility. Dina Dalal, a young widow, is continuously forced by her brother to get married again. As Dina Dalal doesn't want to get married soon, Nusswan persuades her by saying "Soon? You call it soon? You are twenty-six years old. What are you hoping for?" (51)

A Fine Balance is a critique of the plight of women after the declaration of Internal Emergency in India when the government launched Family Planning Programme undertaken by Sanjay Gandhi and his men. Thought they saw it as a solution to population control, but it caused bitterness among people of the country. The poor men were motivated to undergo sterilisation by giving them incentives like a transistor, a ration card or money. The poor people underwent the operation double time. This politically motivated programme suffered women too much. At a sterilisation camp, an old woman comes wailing and requests the doctors not to operate her by saying, "I am old, my womb is barren, there are no eggs in it. Why are you wasting operation on me?" (521) No one listens to her request and she is forcibly performed up on as it is the target of the government to get maximum cases of sterilisation done.

Rohinton Mistry has questioned the fundamental rights of Indian constitution in *A Fine Balance*. Although the constitution of India grants equal rights to women on a par with men, yet in the era of twenty- first century women are denied their empowered identity. The women of India suffer from gender identity and they are humiliated at the time of their marriage too. The cultural practice of dowry has taken the lives of many innocent women. It is horrible in the case of poor girls whose parents are unable to pay them handsome dowry. Due to this evil, many girls are compelled to live unmarried life and sometimes it endangers their parents. The evil of dowry system has been presented beautifully in *A Fine Balance* where three grand-daughters of a poor man leave their home and commit suicide. In order to arrange the dowry for their granddaughters, the poor man undergoes vasectomy. Unfortunately, he dies of this operation. In this way, Rohinton Mistry interrogates the rights of women and highlights the shameful evil of dowry in Indian society.

Rohinton Mistry exposes the double standard of male dominated society in India. Man claims to be the guard of woman. Whenever he has an opportunity to exploit woman, he makes full use of it. Woman, for him, is a selfless and soulless object. Through the characters of Roopa and Dina Dalal, Mistry exhibits the sexual exploitation of women in Indian society. Roopa is a poor woman belonging to low-caste and she is seduced by a guard of a rich man's orchard. Roopa's seduction raises the question of double standard in the practice of untouchability. The man who hates touching an untouchable can have sex with a low-caste man. There is another example of women's exploitation by men when a tanner woman is shaved her head and made to walk naked through the square. She feels humiliated due to the cruel and harsh treatment of the upper class people. The problems of women never end in the novel. Roopa, Radha, Dukhi and the daughters are burnt alive.

No F. I.R. is registered against the Thakur because the victims are dalit.

Rohinton Mistry in his second novel, *A Fine Balance*, has beautifully explained the pathetic conditions of women belonging to the marginalised section of Indian society. According to Mistry, the situation of women in India is pitiable and they are totally dependent on men. In spite of India being a democratic country, women have not been treated as equal to men. Women are exploited physically, culturally, psychologically as well as economically. They always face a lot of challenges since their birth and their problems meet with an end only after their death. Men have always considered themselves superior to women. They have made the lives of women full of sufferings and pain.

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