

## Chapter 9

# Rohinton Mistry - The Fine Balance



### About the author, Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry was born in 1952 in Mumbai, India, of Parsi descent and now lives in Canada, near Toronto. In 1975, after being awarded a B.A. in Mathematics and Economics at the University of Bombay, he emigrated. In Canada, where he received a B.A. in English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto, Mistry started writing short stories. He has won two Hart House literary prizes and the Canadian Fiction Magazine's Annual Contributor's Prize for 1985. Finally, in 1987, he published a collection of short stories called *Tales from Firozsha Baag*.

A born story teller, in his tales Mistry depicts middle class life among the Parsi community, as he recalls it from abroad. Mistry describes daily life among the Parsis of Bombay touchingly, at the same time deals with meaningful themes and significant issues of contemporary multicultural and migrant realities. To understand Mistry's work, one must never forget that Zoroastrian Parsis experienced mass migration to India from the very beginning of their history, in the 8th century, being persecuted in Iran after Islamic conquest. Then, they suffered again diaspora, this time to the West, after the independence of India, when having being the favorite of the British rulers, they fell to disgrace at the end of the Raj. Mistry gives voice both to the feeling of malaise of his people, after decolonization

made their elitist position and Westernized attitudes very unpopular and to his own sense of displacement in Canada. First of all, he tries to show the uniqueness of the Parsi community by focusing on their way of living and their cultural heritage. Then, he stresses the diasporic nature of Parsi social and historical experience, seeking the justification and the sense of his own story of migration in the perspective of the Parsi 'double displacement'.

Coming from people who today feel they are at the margins of the Indian society, refusing nevertheless the dominating Hindu culture, in his stories. Mistry tries to preserve the memory of his native environment and to testify the specificity of his being a Parsi, both in India and in Canada, Mistry points to the problems of East - West relationships and focuses on the difficulties of immigration.

### **Summary of the novel A Fine Balance**

The novel is a saga that spans the momentous events of India's history from the turbulent times of the country's Partition in 1947, to the macabre aftermath of its Prime Minister's assassination in 1984.

The story is built upon four characters whose predicaments intersect during the "State of Internal Emergency" declared by Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Two tailors, Ishwar and Omprakash Darji, along with a student, Maneck Kohlah, are propelled by circumstances into the life of Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow, who struggles to make ends meet in a heartless metropolis, ostensibly Mumbai. Mistry manipulates the story in a way that the reader is shuffled between various time phases that mark each major historical upheaval. He highlights crucial events in the country's chronicle by depicting the background of each protagonist. The lives of the tailor's forefathers reflect the tyranny of the caste system in rural India where unimaginable horrors are perpetrated on the lower castes. In Maneck Kohlah's background lies the pathetic story of India's partition when religion became the unnatural reason for the birth of two nations. Dina's past underlines the sense of squalor and failure that middle classes often face rather helplessly in an underdeveloped nation struggling to improve its economic status. It is an effort at interweaving national history with the personal lives of the protagonists in a manner that is characteristic of immigrant Indian English writing.

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## **9.0 Objectives**

Friends, in this chapter we will study a postcolonial Indian English novel i.e. Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance. This chapter will enable you to discuss :

- The postcolonial Indian themes in the novel.
- The historical era of Emergency.
- The shattering of the lives of the common masses due to politics.

## **9.1 Introduction**

Friends, in the last chapter, we have studied short story as a literary form through the short story 'An Astrologer's Day' by R. K. Narayan. In this chapter, we are going to examine critically Rohinton Mistry's novel A Fine Balance. It describes the life in Mumbai through the lives of some characters from different backgrounds facing Political Emergency declared by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi. It had its impact on all the sections of India. The novel focuses on the human relationships and the shattering of the same.

## **9.2 Background to the novel "The Fine Balance"**

The novel has as its milieu the "City by the Sea" - Mumbai or Bombay, a city marked by constant and permanent changes in its landscape, skyscrapers and in the people who inhabit it. Here more than anywhere else in India, one witnesses the lives of the people

being governed and even enmeshed by globalization, by networks of new and foreign media images on the one hand, and by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, exploitation and homelessness, on the other. This gives the impression of identities getting detached and disembodied from specific places and times and becoming free floating. The novel deals with characters that are displaced, isolated and estranged, framed against the background of the anonymous, impersonal and terrifying metropolis.

The footpaths, the slums, the teeming offices, the tenements, the Parsi enclaves are all created and then recreated, in the fiction of Mistry, just as they continue to form and reform in reality. The Congress Party led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi whom Mistry seems to be blaming for the "worst of times" in modern India in both of his novels, *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, is here involved in raising funds for the Jawaans who are fighting for the pride of the nation and for the liberation of East Bengal.

### **9.3 Emergency and Politics in "The Fine Balance"**

The period of Emergency is as much a blotch on the country's conscience as partition had been, not to think of the riots following the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

#### **Realistic portrayal of Emergency**

Every atrocity that is known to have been committed during the Emergency occurs to Mistry's characters and the novel becomes a template for a stark and unsparing portrait of that time in India. With the curtailing of the fundamental rights of the people, everything became topsy turvy, the press was censored, with the new law MISA anybody could be imprisoned without trial and there were countless deaths in police custody. Valmik, the poet - reader says, I am inspired by the poet Yeats. I find his words relevant during this shameful Emergency -

"Things fall apart; the center cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world".

(p 556)

Under the City Beautification Scheme, hutment colonies were

demolished and millions were rendered homeless, a new strategy was formulated for beggary problem and the pavement dwellers were made to slog like bonded laborers. The most brutal aspect of Emergency was that anyone, young or old, married or unmarried was compelled to undergo Family Planning Operation. Ration cards were issued only to those who had a Family Planning Certificate and people had to choose between food and manhood. Incentives like transistors were offered for this. Ishvar and Om too, became victims of Emergency and the writer gives a heart - rendering account of their vasectomization, the removal of Om's testicles just before his wedding and the amputation of Ishvar's legs, turning them into crippled beggars.

The Internal Emergency forms the backdrop for the entire novel. The condition of the common man, especially those who chose to oppose this anti - democratic period was a very pathetic one. It is during this period that every Indian was under surveillance. As Mistry, describes it, the gaze was everywhere now. Everyone was suspect, everyone had to be investigated and suddenly new Student Unions sprang up which expected total submission to their demands and their codes of conduct. Students and teachers who voiced their honest opinion were promptly arrested and never heard of again.

One of the many horrendous atrocities unleashed during the Emergency was under the name of the Beautification Campaign of the cities. Entire slums were demolished and reduced to rubble in areas like Turkman Gate. Mistry describes how Om and Ishvar learn from Rajaram that the hutment dwellers were tricked into leaving their huts. The poor are rendered homeless in this new insistence on the Beautification of the City. In this period, one arm of the law - the police - is actively involved in the process of discipline in a number of ways. The accumulation of capital needs a labor force. In the totalitarian regime that existed during the period of Emergency (1974 - 77), a work force was organized - created - very much on the lines of slave workers. Beggars, pavement dwellers, tailors, carpenters, rag pickers, scrap dealers and hair collectors are all herded into trucks to be driven to work sites because

"In a huge city like this there is work even for a corpse."

(p 404)

The brutality in the treatment of these bonded laborers is

presented graphically by Mistry - their living conditions, food and clothing, the total disregard for even the minimum concern for human dignity or even life etc and its subjection seemed to be the sole aim and no one was expected to question it. Mistry draws a vivid picture of the reign of terror that was unleashed in the name of national security and welfare. Protests were met with bullets and all semblances of fundamental rights or liberty and freedom of expression were totally nullified.

Emergency, a defence of an insecure leader, disturbs the coherence of routine of the average lives of Ishwar Darjee and his youthful nephew, Omprakash Darjee and their employer Dina Dalal, middle - aged widow and her paying guest, Maneck Kohlah. Dina and Maneck are only the indirect victims of Emergency as their lives are dependent on the lives of the tailors, Ishvar and Om. All of them are aware of something stifling their lives though they cannot link of the existing political scenario of the country. Their struggle for survival, as far as they are concerned does not have a political angle to it. They all believe that the oft heard word 'Emergency' is a sort of a game played by the power center and it would really affect the ordinary people like them. Hence each in his way tries to connect the pervading discomfort and insecurity to their problems of the here and now. Very soon when their simplest dreams get thwarted they are forced into realizing the mayhem created by the Emergency.

For Ishwar and Om, the huge cut - outs of the Prime Minister with inspiring slogans for hard work and sincerity are mere markers in the confusing labyrinth of the city streets. However, they realize the implication when they are forcibly bundled away to the Prime Minister's meeting to fill in the numbers. With neither the promised tea nor the free bus ride, Ishvar and Om return thirsty and tired. For Dinabai their absence is the usual sign of arrogance of the labor class, once their meal is assured.

The second blow is when the tailors' shack is bulldozed to ground as part of the Slum Evacuation Programme. Ishvar is content that at least their sewing machines are safe at Dinabai's. They stuff all their belongings in a trunk and sinking under its weight, go all over the city in search of a place to live in. They realize that even to sleep on the platform they must pay the policeman.

The third blow of Emergency in their lives is when Ishvar and Om

are picked up by the police from their rented footpath dwelling to work as construction workers as part of the City Beautification Project. Ishvar's protest that they are not street urchins or beggars falls on deaf ears. They are forced into a truck and are compelled to abandon their daily bread and butter for a number of days for reasons far beyond their control. Maneck tries to pacify the agitated Dina Aunty during this period.

The final and fatal blow to their lives is an unwarranted police raid at the market place on their return to the small town near their ancestral village. Ishvar and Om are forcibly taken to a sterilization camp of the town near their ancestral village. People like Thakur Dharamsi were surviving by auctioning their patients who come to clinics, for unless a Government employee produces two or three cases of sterilization; his salary for a month is held back. Provoked by Om's act of spitting towards him, in an act of vendetta, the Thakur, the villain of their family's ruin, orders another operation on the already sterilized Om - the Thakur has a special interest in the boy who is suffering from a testicular tumor, is the justification provided by the nurses. Ishvar's hope of getting a reverse operation of Om done gets sterilized. Ishvar's feet wounded at the beautification project develop gangrene and his legs are to be amputated. They return to 'our city', Mumbai with a little trolley fitted with small wheels for Ishvar and a rope for Om to pull it and finally, turned into beggars. Dina, back at her brother's covers herself with the unfinished quilt recollecting the events and experiences concealed in the rightly knit patches.

Some of these upheavals, like the emergence of competition in the cold drinks business, occur as part of life's struggle. However, in the novel, most upheavals take place because of the imposition of Internal Emergency. The evictions of the poor from the cities, the forced labor camps, the sterilizations are all the various manifestations of the Internal Emergency. Mistry sharply criticizes the Internal Emergency. He shows that all the avowed promises of the Emergency to abolish bonded labor, child labor, sati, dowry system, child marriage and harassment of backward castes by upper castes never have materialized. Instead as Mistry shows in several instances in the novel, a nexus emerges between the police and the established hierarchy either the upper dominance in the villages or the land or building mafias in Mumbai.

Various episodes in the novel reveal Mistry's sympathy for the oppressed and concern at authoritarian, oppressive practices during the two year period of Internal Emergency. During the course of the narrative, Mistry makes some revealing political insights. The transition in rural life, the change in aspirations of the lower castes, the attempts by the upper castes to preserve the old order is aptly delineated. A major instance is the violence perpetuated by Thakur Dharamsi and his henchmen against Narayan's family during the week of parliamentary elections. The generation gap is shown in the aspiration of the lower castes. Narayan's father tells his son,

"You changed from Chamar to tailor. Be satisfied with that."

(p 143)

However, Narayan who is educated wants to exercise his rights. He wants to actually vote in the elections and not let the blank ballots be filled by the landlords' men. Mistry in succinct prose shows the cynical manipulation of elections in rural India. Two years later when elections take place, Narayan tries to assert his democratic right and cast his own vote instead of abetting the process of rigged elections. For his defiance, Narayan and two other 'Chamars' are forcibly gagged, flogged and tortured.

Narayan's family for defying the existing social order pays an extreme price. Dukhi (Narayan and Ishvar's father), Roopa, Radha and the daughters are bound and burnt alive. Mistry implies that the needless arrogance of the upper castes in trying to maintain social supremacy led to the consolidation and emergence of the Dalits in Indian politics. The rise of the Dalits as a political and social force in the 1990s in India and the caste warfare in the countryside is hinted at by the novelist, Omprakash's contempt and defiance of Thakur Dharamsi on their return to the small town near their ancestral village. Mistry's novel makes an astute political comment because it shows that in rural India, the upper castes aggravated social tensions by their insensitive and churlish behavior.

The ultimate indictment of the Internal Emergency comes in the description of the 'Nusbandi Mela' in the closing chapters of the novel. The author aptly describes the callous indifference of the authorities who are more keen on "targets have to be achieved within the budget" rather than human welfare and the upliftment of the poor. The author lucidly shows the involvement of the entrenched, insensitive



bureaucracy in the demolitions of 'jhuggi - jhopris', forced labor camps and sterilization drives. Senior administrators from the Family Planning Centre admonish doctors for not achieving targets. Operations are conducted with partially sterile equipments due to the harsh reprimands of the bureaucrats who are only interested in achieving targets rather than demolishing human sufferings. The euphemism of 'efficiency' and 'the sense of duty' are used to ensure that the Sterilization Operations are preformed even under unhygienic conditions but the planned target of sterilization is achieved.

Very clearly, the author shows that the vested interests are combined with the bureaucracy to perpetuate the status quo under the guise of saving the nation from population explosion. Thakur Dharamsi, the upper caste ring leader, achieves respectability as a political leader during Emergency because he organizes many sterilization camps. He uses his superior position to see that Omprakash is castrated, his testacles are removed. In this way Thakur Dharamsi takes revenge on the lower castes in his village whose only crime was to achieve some social mobility by getting their children educated and sending them to be trained as tailors instead of working with leather as 'Chamars', their traditional occupation. Thakur Dharamsi's cruel misuse of authority shows that the trend of criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime has been rampant in India in the last decade of the twentieth century. It started in the period of Internal Emergency. This is an astute political insight by the author. Mistry also hints in his novel that constant oppression by the upper castes would lead to violence and an uprising by the lower castes. When Ishvar goes to register a complaint at the Police Station about his nephew's castration, the constable on duty is perturbed. So, in a way, Mistry is being quite clairvoyant and hints at the rise of the numerous Dalit Senas in several states in India, as retaliation against the upper caste oppression they had to suffer.

### **Politics in the novel**

In an inventive manner of characterization, the author creates the persona of the administrator, the Facilitator, the Motivator, the Slum - lord, the Thakur and the Bal Baba. Each of these men is parasites feeding on the helplessness and gullibility of the common man, destroying those who dare to question their ideology or defy their

commands. The administrator represents the state machinery involved in brutal coercive sterilizations; the Facilitator and the Motivator represent the corrupt bureaucracy that takes a hefty cut for providing basic amenities; the Slum - lord and the Thakur are the agents of social repression, letting loose their goons on all those who try to break free from the chains of the strict codification of social groupings. Bal Baba symbolizes the hold that ruthless god men have over an illiterate, superstitious populace whose monetary donations pander to the desires of the God man's body rather than the spirit. History reasserts itself in macabre ways in the novel. The story of Avinash has strong allegorical undertones as it has parallels with the tragic murder case of the engineering student, Rajan, during the Emergency. The suicide of Avinash's sisters is reminiscent of the combined suicide of three young girls in India's industrial city of Kanpur, who could not bear to see their father's humiliation and social scorn for not being able to provide them respectable dowries for marriage.

Mistry's perception of and reaction to the dark periods of Indian history are never clearly stated but are always implicitly conveyed. The book stands as a scathing attack on the degeneration of political morals, agonizing over the insensitivity of the ruling classes and coming down heavily on the subversion of the various institutions. Mistry makes no secret of his loathing for the powers and places the blame at the door of the heartless politicians.

While dealing with the lives of common people in post - independent India, the novel captures the socio - political - cultural turmoil of this period. Mistry achieves the remarkable feat of mixing historical slices with the personal lives of the characters and attempts to portray the reality of India by weaving together four worlds in the fabric of the novel. The first is the middle class, urban world of Dina Dalal, a pretty widow in her forties. Then there is a glimpse into the rural India provided by Ishvar Darji and his nephew Omprakash - who are Chamars and have liberated themselves from caste stereotypes by becoming tailors in Bombay and gradually got caught in the quagmire of this nether world. There is another world symbolized by Maneck Kohlah, a sensitive Parsi boy, whose perambulations bring the reader occasionally into the predatory world of the university student. The novel is not only about the shared lives of these four major characters, which at one stage live under the same roof, but it

also speaks about their separate entities.

The novel, on the one hand, is a realistic portrayal of trains crossing the new border, carrying nothing but corpses, the conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, fanatics burning shops and houses, involved in arson and bloodshed and the entire country in the grip of communalism. On the other hand, it faithfully describes the communal conflicts of 1984 caused by the death of Indira Gandhi when the Sikhs were ruthlessly burnt alive.

Mistry stresses the fact that in postcolonial India the plight of common people has not ameliorated and they have to face the same exploitation and injustice as in the rule of the British colonizer, as one of the characters says,

"Of course, for ordinary people, nothing has changed."

(p 581)

It seems as if the native rulers have merely replaced the foreign rulers and the Indian government in the post - independence period has failed to resolve the basic problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and disease. A considerable percentage of people live below the poverty line leading a hand to mouth existence and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. The writer draws a pathetic picture of near - naked people in Bombay slums, with meager possessions, lean, emaciated babies, hungry and crying. Through the world of Maneck and his friend Avinash, Mistry gives us a glimpse into the evils of the Indian college campuses, the shameful ragging, the nepotism in staff hiring, the bribery for admissions, the sale of examination papers, the special privileges for politicians' families, the government interference in the syllabus, the intimidation of the faculty members and the student politics in the campus. Avinash's death remains a mystery and the burns on the shameful parts of his body reveal that he did not fall off a fast train but it was a case of student politics and of wrongful death in the police custody.

The Indian society is decaying from the top to downwards. The corrupt leaders have exchanged wisdom and good governance from cowardice and self - aggrandizement. For votes and power, they play with human lives and accept money from businessmen needing favors. The pre - election speeches of leaders are crammed with false promises of powerful laws. For them "Passing laws is like passing

water, it all ends down the drain."

(p 143)

During elections, the illiterate villagers are cheated and the ballot papers are filled by men hired by the politicians. The novelist lays bare the election system of the world's largest democracy and the hypocrisy of the politicians.

The novel focuses on the display of the various forms of power and the violence in the novel. The power in the novel is mainly of five types: exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient and integrative. Exploitative power is the most prevalent type in the novel. This form of power is always associated with force. The potential of violence is inseparable from exploitative power. The sway of the upper caste Thakurs in Dukhi's village is a good example of it. The Thakurs are indulged in a perennial caste war against the "Untouchables" of the village. This stranglehold is achieved through recurrent violence - beatings, torture, rape etc. The killing of Narayan is notable for the raw savagery of their power.

The Monkey Man likewise tortures his animals, the two monkeys Laila - Majnoo and the dog Tikka. The wretched animals perform antics to entertain people under the perpetual threat of beatings from their master. Later, after the death of the animals, the Monkey Man substitutes two children. Thus he extends the cruelty into the human dimension.

The Beggar Master, a Fagin - like character, leads a team of mutilated beggars. They surrender their earnings to him. The Beggar Master's cruelty is also well - known. We are informed by the Monkey Man that Beggar Master may have mutilated them to enhance their potential as beggars.

The landlord, who harasses Dina Dalal, never appears in person. His power is embodied in the thugs and the Rent Collector, who terrorizes the tenants. Their power manifests as violence when they beat up Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck and vandalize Dina's flat. The Beggar Master offers protection to Dina. Paradoxically, his protection to Dina operates through violence wrought upon others; in this case, the landlord's ruffians. The Beggar Master breaks their fingers and they are thus "persuaded" to leave Dina alone. In return for his protection he has to be paid. Dina and the tailors make veiled

references to their own fate if their "Protector" is not paid in time.

If exploitative power hinges upon violence, it is also inextricably linked to profits for the exploiter. The threat of force is used to enhance their own advantage. The Thakurs, for example, obtain cheap labor from the lower caste villagers. When the workers demand their due wages, they are threatened with violence. The Monkey Man earns his living by his animals. The Beggar Master's income accrues from the earnings of his beggars. The landlord of course collects the rent from his terrorized tenants.

For the Thakurs, exploitation follows a thorough understanding of the conditions of the lower castes: their poverty, ignorance and ill health.

A false epistemic base is also established by the exploiters. In the village, the Thakurs connive with the Brahmins for the purpose. They defend their emphasis on purity and caste distinctions as being sanctioned by the scriptures. The "Divine Law" is invoked to reinforce the system. The Brahmin Pandit Lalluram pacifies Dukhi by reiterating the "dharmic duty" of all castes. He enjoins Dukhi to preserve, since the system was required to prevent universal chaos.

If exploitative power depends on violence, manipulative power occurs more covertly. In the novel, characters like Nusswan illustrate this power. Nusswan runs the Shroff household after his father's death. From then on, he controls the other members of the family. Dina's young age and their mother's approaching senility make for their total dependence upon Nusswan. He therefore regulates Dina's money, dresses, education and friendships. Later this power is used to induce Dina into marriage. This move however does not work. After a span of time, with widowhood and subsequent penury, she is forced to approach Nusswan for help. Nusswan's monetary assistance helps him retain his hold over her.

Dina herself is not beyond manipulative moves. Ishvar and Omprakash Darji are desperate for jobs. Dina hires them to sew for her, at a meager wage. She is careful not to give them undue importance, even though they sustain her own existence. Dina does not allow the two to know her suppliers or market. To this end, she seals them, literally, away from business. She padlocks the front door when she goes to the export house.

As may be deduced from the above readings, manipulative power is frequently indistinguishable from exploitative power. The major differentiating factor is the lessened potential of violence in this type of power. It is more sophisticated in its pervasiveness as exemplified by Dina's strategies of using affection and kindness to overcome any resistance from tailors. The victims almost consent to the manipulation. Most of the time, the exploiter uses tactics (coercion, persuasion, emotional blackmail - all seen in Dina's methods) in proportion to the ignorance or lack of ability of the victim. This is demonstrated in Dina's quiet conversion of Omprakash: the pain in his arm, her concern, and the medical attention given to him and of course, his gratitude for it.

A third kind of power is competitive power. This power can also be constructive because it produces a healthy rivalry between people, thus improving productivity. Dina Dalal's attempts to squeeze out profits from her small venture are regulated by the constant threat from other similar businessmen. Shankar, the mutilated beggar is highly regarded by the Beggar Master because he is the best earner in comparison to others.

Government officials in the novel compete with each other to perform more Family Planning Operations. Their promotions (over others), salaries and even jobs are at stake. Hence they strongly compete with each other in the programme.

The Kohlah family ruins its business because they do not envisage competition. Maneck's father refuses to compete with rivals. Here absence of competitive power spells doom.

The fourth category of power is "nutrient power". This is the power "for" the other, suggestive of a certain care and responsibility. This power generally manifests as paternalism. Nutrient power is also embedded alongside the other kinds of power. For instance, Dina's brother, Nusswan, in spite of his bullying and manipulation, obviously cares for her. He frequently helps her out during difficulties and concerned for her safety and health, her lonely life and future. In turn, Dina's awareness of her brother's sarcastic tongue and inherent selfishness (Nusswan dismisses the servant each time Dina moves into the house) is tempted by the knowledge of his affection.

Dina is not merely an exploitative employer to Ishvar and Omprakash.

She is protective and caring on occasions. When Omprakash develops a painful arm, she herself rubs an ointment much to the surprise of the two men. Later she allows them to stay in her tiny flat to protect them from police atrocities. When the novel concludes, Dina even risks Nusswan's wrath by feeding the two (now reduced to beggars) secretly. She herself wonders how long her conspiratorial good deeds can go on.

The Monkey Man adores his pets as his own children. The Beggar Master is actually quite protective towards his "wards", as the handicapped Shankar keeps repeating.

The above illustrations reveal how most of the exploitative powers are also paternalistic. In Mistry, it is the government which is castigated as undemocratic and unpaternal. Throughout the novel, the Government's exploitative power, cruelty and the evil of juridical - political machinery is emphasized. The Government installed to protect actually robs, maims and kills its own people. The lower level exploiters - individuals - at least temper their exploitative power with gestures of filial affection. Mistry seems to suggest that it is in institutions that exploitations remain "unadulterated", impersonal and inhuman.

Integrative power is the final category. Here opposites - thesis and anti - thesis - may come together in a synthesis. In Mistry's novel, the synthesis occurs among the marginalized and the exploited. This group forges its own power links. For example, Narayan and the two other lower caste villagers rebel against the Thakurs. They oppose them during election time. Dina and the tailors barely manage to keep poverty away by their unity. They also in a symbolic instance, ward off peril from the rent collector. The doctors are also the exploited, since Government policy forces them into unethical activities through threats. The doctors therefore unite against the victims by refusing to take their complaints seriously. The victims are themselves integrated against the common oppression.

Mistry's novel is tragic in that this integrative power is never successful in its manifestation. The rebel lower caste villagers are tortured and murdered. The landlord manages to evict Dina. The victims of the forced sterilization programme do not get justice. Here we reiterate our reading of Mistry: that the system prevents and prohibits validation of any integrative move by individuals. Mistry

demonstrates this failure of the system in the character of the Facilitator. These "types" are stooges of the Government, who run their business out of purely personal considerations and with no human feelings. The system thus creates fifth columns within the people to prevent integration. The powers remain unaffected and the result is violence.

### **9.2 & 9.3 Check your progress**

1. Describe the background city in the novel.

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2. How do Mistry's characters' lives change due to Emergency?

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3. How did the City Beautification Scheme affect the hutment colonies?

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4. Describe the Family Planning Programmes organized under the Emergency?

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5. What was the condition of students and teachers during Emergency?

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6. Describe the labor force of the poor organized during Emergency.

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7. How are Ishvar and Om treated when they are picked up for City Beautification Programme?

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8. What are the avowed promises of Emergency?

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9. How is Narayan punished for asserting his democratic rights?

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10. Describe the involvement of bureaucracy in the Family Planning Programmes.

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11. What does the administrator represent?

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12. What does the Motivator represent?

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13. What are the Slum - lord and Thakur agents of?

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14. What does Bal Baba symbolize?

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15. With whom do the story of Avinash and his sisters run parallel to?

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16. Describe the conditions of Indian people under the post - independence government.

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17. Which are the evils of the Indian college campuses?

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18. Which are the types of power displayed in the novel?

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19. How does the Monkey Man use exploitative powers?

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20. Describe the use of manipulative power by Nusswan.

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21. How does Dina exert manipulative powers?

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22. What is 'nutrient power'?

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23. How does the government use power, according to Mistry?

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#### **9.4 Plot of the novel in "The Fine Balance"**

The novel begins in 1975 with the accidental meeting of Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck Kohlah in a train. Within a page or two of the novel's opening, we find a dead body lying on the railway tracks near the level crossing. Emergency has just been declared in the country and the common people have yet to understand the threat awaiting them. Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck head for Dina's home where they will share lives for a while before their lives are irretrievably shattered. The two tailors are hired to enable Dina to earn a living through selling dresses on contract to Au Revoir Export Company. And Maneck is an old school friend's son, who will live as a paying guest in her apartment. All this we learn in the prologue itself. A series of temporal shifts mark the narrative. The first chapter recounts the story of Dina Dalal from the age of twelve and the death of her father to the age of forty - two and the hiring of the tailors. The second chapter

returns to the present and introduces us to the manager of Au Revoir Exports, Mrs. Gupta. Through Mrs. Gupta's approval of Mrs. Gandhi's actions, we are confronted with the complicity of the Indian business houses with the outrages committed during this period.

Dina's assumption that the Emergency is irrelevant from the point of view of the common people turns out to be woefully misguided. As she struggles to eke out a living for herself, events conspire for her; events conspire to strip each character of dignity and humanity. The acrimony that marks the relationship between Dina and the tailors at the start of the novel transforms itself during the course of the narrative to mutual respect and compassion. Ibrahim, the rent collector, who plays multiple roles of spy, blackmailer and deliverer of threats and harasser of tenants, carries a folder with many compartments and pouches to sort out these roles. Ironically, the landlord finally sacks him, ostensibly for wearing out too many folders but in truth because he has become a compassionate rent collector, an oxymoron in motion.

The third chapter again goes back in time to Ishvar and Omprakash's story. In this section, we are confronted with caste oppression at its starkest. Ishvar's father, Dukhi violates caste restrictions in attempting to make his sons into tailors. This shows surprising courage in a man who has been socialized into accepting his position in the caste hierarchy unquestioningly.

During his childhood years, he mastered a full catalogue of the real and the imaginary crimes a low - caste person could commit and the corresponding punishments were engraved upon his memory. By the time he entered his teens, he had acquired all the knowledge he would need to perceive that invisible line of caste he could never cross, to survive in the village like his ancestors, with humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions. This is a particularly moving section of the novel bringing to life the sordid conditions of the lower caste Indians living in the rural India. Even the upper caste women are not exempted from oppression. We are told that they resented the birth of the two sons to Dukhi.

Through Dukhi's story we are brought back to the time of the Independence struggle in India. It is ironic that pledges of fighting against caste injustice were taken then but are still to be redeemed. Dukhi works towards an individual revolution - breaking with lifelong

traditions - to apprentice his sons as tailors with Ashraf.

In the end of the course "everything ends badly". Twenty years pass after independence and nothing changes. Narayan points to the fact that as a Chamar he cannot drink water at the village well, worship in the temples of the upper castes or walk where he likes. When he attempts to assert his right to vote, he is brutally tortured and then hanged in the village square. Other untouchables are beaten up at random, their women are raped and their huts are burnt down. The Thakur decided that Dukhi's family deserves special punishment because he had turned cobblers into tailors and distorted society's timeless balance.

Dukhi, Roopa, Radha and the daughters along with Narayan's corpse are burnt alive at the behest of the Thakur. Omprakash dreams of revenge but both Ashraf and Ishvar know the futility of such dreams and instead decide to send Om to Mumbai. With this move, a new phase starts in the lives of Om and Ishvar. In the city, it is class rather than caste that oppresses them. They are forced to stay in jhopadpattis that are mowed down. They are rounded up with the street beggars and forced to work as unpaid labor. Their attempts to live their lives with some semblance of dignity are frustrated at various points. On the other hand, they do meet an interesting variety of characters such as the Monkey Man or Rajaram. Though Mistry's tone through this section of the novel is slightly jocular, he does manage to let us see the reality behind the glamour of the Dream city, Mumbai.

The fifth section of the novel deals with the story of Maneck. His story is the story of the ecological denudation of the Himalayas through the forces of "development" and the death of the indigenous enterprise through the entry of the multinationals. Mr. Kohlah's increasing sense of loss colors his relationship with his son who becomes increasingly alienated from his father. Maneck is sent to study air conditioning and refrigeration in Mumbai and meets the dynamic student leader, Avinash. Avinash really represents the voice that is silenced by Mistry's narrative. For every display of force, there is always resistance. That resistance was not less heroic in the period of the Emergency than during the course of the freedom struggle. That is heroism is not officially documented or publicized but it nevertheless existed. For a brief while we are given a glimpse of that aspect of the Emergency in the portrayal of Avinash.

Mistry describes the brief spell of optimism, the formation of student bodies, the agents adopted and the resolutions passed. But his emphasis is on the experience of Maneck, who refuses to get involved in any of such activities and resents the fact that he has lost the company of his friend, Avinash because of his involvement with such work. Avinash mysteriously disappears. Maneck makes only a half-hearted attempt to find Avinash. The mysterious disappearance of Avinash meets the narrative logic of Mistry's novel: that everything ends badly.

#### **9.4 Check your progress**

1. How does the first chapter describe Dina?

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2. How does the second chapter describe the Indian Business Houses?

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3. Who is Ibrahim and why is he fired from his job?

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4. Describe Dukhi's story in the third chapter.

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5. How do Ishvar and Om suffer from class oppression in Mumbai?

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6. What does Maneck's story inform us about?

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#### **9.5 Themes in the novel "The Fine Balance"**

The novel is set in India in 1975, during Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency; it is a neo - realist story of extreme poverty and true friendship among outcastes. In this novel, Mistry does not only deal

with the misery of common people and the brutality of tyrannical politics: he also describes the horrors of a government work - camp, the tortures in state prisons. In short all the humiliation, the suffering and the wrong that poor people have to suffer under fascist governments. Actually, Mistry sees Indira Gandhi's politics as decidedly fascist, to the point that even the everyday life of ordinary people under her rule appears to be characterized by sheer brutality.

### **Father - son Conflict**

The father - son conflict, is characterized by the unwillingness of the father to read the writing on the wall, as it were. Rustom Kolah runs a small family business in the idyllic hills of North India. His specialty is the Kaycee (Kolah's Cola), which he makes according to a secret formula handed down to him over the generations. When the multi - nationals invade the hills, with their new - fangled technology and hard - hitting advertising campaigns Kaycee is on its way to a slow but sure death. Maneck exhorts his father to advertise, to adopt new technologies but to no avail. Modernization, like death, is a great leveler. Here it is the survival of the fittest.

Industrialization and capitalism are responsible for progress, prosperity and the rising living standards and also for the angst of displacement and in extreme cases, even for aggression against self. These constitute the worst of modernism and find a poignant reflection in the novel. The novel opens with Om, Ishvar and Maneck meeting for the first time on a local train. All the three are unknown to each other but are bound for a common destination - Dina Dalal's residence. The train is delayed because a man has committed suicide by throwing himself on the railway tracks.

Mistry cleverly foregrounds displacement and suicide, the key motifs in the opening pages of the novel. Dina Dalal, Parsi widow lives in genteel poverty trying to maintain a fine balance between her financial independence and destitution, which would result in her dependence on her brother Nusswan, who happens to be a petty tyrant. She seeks to employ two tailors to do the piece - work for an export company and have a paying guest stay in her tiny flat to supplement her meager income. Ishvar - Om, the uncle - nephew pair of tailors, who have come to Mumbai in search of an employment and dream of returning home after having made a lot of money, come to Dina's flat in response to her search for tailors. Maneck, who has been

flushed out of the hills has come to Mumbai for higher studies and finds the rat - infested students' hostel and ragging too much to bear and has come to Dina's shabby flat in response to her offer made to Maneck's mother of paying guest accommodation to 'a nice Parsi boy'. Thus the exigencies of displacement bring these four people together. Ishvar, Om and Maneck all of them represent the 'transitional man'. They are men whose roots have been torn asunder from the soil of their respective traditional lives.

### **Diaspora**

If the multi - nationals are indirectly responsible for Maneck's diaspora from the hills, Om and Ishvar are propelled from the "Village by the River" to the "City by the Sea" to escape the atrocities of caste - based politics and the virtual collapse of retail family run enterprises in the face of growing industrialization. The diaspora of Om and Ishvar epitomizes the widespread phenomenon of casteist politics and communal riots uprooting whole populations of poor, ragged, unsuspecting and politically unawakened masses and casting them into new identities. This is further compounded by economic and financial losses in the wake of modernization and capitalist enterprise.

### **Displacement**

As a Parsi and then an immigrant in Canada, Mistry sees himself as a symbol of double displacement. This sense of displacement is a recurrent reality in the lives of the novel's protagonists. Ishwar and Omprakash traditionally belonged to the low caste of cobblers that is of "Chamars". Social repression and bleak prospects made their forefathers push them into a more respectable profession - tailoring. It highlights the human will to disengage from the fetters of the subaltern existence. In the novel, these men, though employed as tailors, are constantly aware of their roots within the Indian social framework and are beset always by a sense of fatalism and guilt that is the lot of the lower castes. As history would bear testimony, dwindling avenues of work economic compulsions and the lure of the metropolis take them away, like many others, from their familiar rural environment. They are two of the thousands of such displaced, hesitant, struggling individuals who fight incessantly to secure a place in the maddening crowd of the urban life. The emotional displacement of adopting a new professional identity and the physical displacement of moving to the city combine to give Om and Ishwar a yearning to repossess the

simple pleasures of rural life. Such feelings are accompanied by a complex sense of alienation to which they finally succumb and end up as beggars on the streets of the metropolis.

Maneck Kohlah, the young man from the pristine slopes of the Himalayas, is another victim of this sense of double displacement. Apart from the geographical transition from the secure recesses of the parental home, Maneck has to face the disturbing emotional displacement into urban college life. In an India trying to reconcile it to the Emergency, Maneck has to swallow the insults of seniors and has to endeavor to adapt himself to the repressive political atmosphere in college. Mistry creates the character of Avinash, a fiery student activist, as a foil to Maneck and in the brutal political murder of Avinash; Maneck understands his own limitations and escapist tendencies. Unable to confront these realities, Maneck seeks a way out in suicide. This brings into focus yet another perspective on the sense of displacement in the novel.

For Dina life is a series of emotional upheavals and relocations of emotional anchors. Traversing the road of life, she is a lonely figure who experiences shocking forms of abuse. Her acute sense of displacement is more emotional than physical as her consciousness flits between ephemeral periods of happiness and seemingly endless bouts of pain. This may be marked in the dichotomy between her brief marriage to Rustom Dalal, her fleeting affair with Freedom, her successful but short lived tailoring enterprise and the abuse at the hands of her brother, physical intimidation by her landlord, the collapse of her tailoring venture with Ishwar and Omprakash and her final humiliating return to her brother's house as an unpaid domestic maid. Dina's transition through life is cyclic in a sense. She begins life in her brother's house and after experiencing the vagaries of life, returns to it in a pathetic state of self - defeat.

### **Mumbai in the novel**

The writer presents a cross - section of Mumbai - the huge slum across the road wearing its malodorous crown of cooking smoke and industrial effluvia, the long queue for water, accompanied by quarrels, lack of basic amenities, open air toilets, the familiar sights of beggars with their begging bowls and the Beggar Master paying the police every week to avoid harassment. Mistry authentically portrays Mumbai and its social ills such as child labor and beggary problem.



The description of the Beggar Master with his imaginative mind, training his beggars and dressing them with a variety of wounds manages to raise a laugh as their chill penury is juxtaposed with the lighter side of their lives.

Depressed and demoralized by the ruthless murder of their entire family, pressured by joblessness and hunger and envisioning a bright future for them, Ishvar and Omprakash migrate to Bombay like Rajaram who says,

"Thousands and thousands are coming to the city because of bad times in their native place. I came for the same reason"

(p 171)

"The city grabs you, sinks its claws into you and refuses to let go."

(p 172)

Their lives in Bombay symbolize the anguish, pain, anxiety and restlessness of the people cut off from their native village. Like nomads, they moved from Nawaz's awning to their slum dwelling, then to the railway platform and then to the entrance of a chemist's shop where they are mistaken for beggars, compelled to slog as laborers and finally are released from this inviolable hell by the Beggar Master. Their incapacity to find a home, despite numerous efforts is touching and pitiable. They are caught in an inescapable dilemma, between two worlds - their native village which they abandoned because it held a bleak chance and Bombay which has failed them despite promises - they stay on as marginal men, unable to discard the old and to find peace in the new.

### **Depiction of casteism**

Mistry has concentrated on the pessimistic image of his lost motherland, gives an insight into the rural India and mentions the atrocities committed on the untouchables. The Chamars spent their life in obedient compliance with the traditions and of the caste system and survived with humiliation and forbearance as their constant companions. Buddhu's wife refused to go to the field with the Zamindar's son so they shaved off her head and walked her naked through the square and Dukhi's wife was raped in the orchard. They were helpless victims and their crimes were varied and imaginative; a Bhungi had dared to let his unclean eyes meet Brahmin's eyes; a Chamar had walked on the wrong side of the temple road and defiled

it; another had strayed near a Puja that was in progress and allowed his undeserving ears to overhear the sacred shlokas. When Dukhi became the father of two sons, he feared for his family's safety and as a precaution, he went out of the way to be obsequious. The children of the low castes were denied the right to education; Ishvar and Narayan were caned severely when they entered the classroom. When Naayan wanted to assert his right to vote, he and his companions were hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree and the Thakur's men brutally killed them. Their bodies were displayed in the village square and their entire family burnt alive. The writer here focuses on man's inhumanity to man and on the deprivation, inequities and injustice faced by the underprivileged in India.

### **Struggle for identity and survival**

All the four main characters are lonely and struggling for identity and survival. Social circumstances, loneliness and a sense of rootlessness bring them together and forge a bond of understanding as they struggle to survive. The human spirit displayed by these four characters of different class backgrounds and ages, despite repeated setbacks upholds Mistry's subtle political theme of how human beings can endure and survive with some dignity despite oppressive circumstances. Ultimately, the four main characters are struggling to maintain 'a fine balance' in their lives.

The novel starts on a note of coincidence. Maneck and the two tailors are sitting in the same compartment of a local train, travelling to the same destination, Dina's house. As is typical in the Indian trains, they start conversing and realize that they are in search of the same address. Initially, both Ishvar and Omprakash are apprehensive that Maneck is a rival for the job. However, they become friendly once they realize that Maneck is not seeking employment with Dina. The months they spend in Dina's house helps this friendship bloom and grow. The plight and sufferings of Omprakash gives Maneck a wider perspective of life and human suffering. Remaining cheerful and retaining a sense of humour despite excessive adversity are admirable qualities in both Ishvar and Omprakash. Maneck also benefits by participating in Dina's struggle to retain her sense of independence. The travails of Ishvar, Omprakash and Dinabai make Maneck realize that his mates in college are trivial comparison. The sense of camaraderie that

develops as this quartet struggle to meet the export order deadlines (Dinabai earns her income by providing tailored clothes to an export firm) gives Maneck a more mature attitude to life. The trials, the tribulations, the shared jokes, the intimacies, eating the same food and a sense of adventure enables Maneck realize that life is often "a fine balance" between happiness and despair. There are always upheavals, whether at the slums where Ishvar and Omprakash reside in Mumbai or problems of food and political disturbance at the residential block at Mancek's college, amongst the beggars in the streets or the emergence of competition which shatters Maneck's father's monopoly of the Cola drinks in his hometown.

### **9.5 Check your progress**

1. What does Mistry describe in the novel?

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2. How is modernism poignantly found in the novel through Kohlah's story?

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3. How have Ishvar, Om and Maneck come together at Dina's home?

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4. What does the diaspora of Ishvar and Om represent?

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5. How is Maneck suffering from double displacement?

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6. How is Dina's life a series of emotional upheavals and relocations of emotional anchors?

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7. How does Mistry present a cross - section of Mumbai?

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8. Describe the various atrocities levied upon the untouchables in the novel.

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## 9.6 Conclusion

Ironic in vision, brooding in tone, amorphous in realities, *A Fine Balance* needs to be read as an expression of the predicament of self in the Indian urban or rural context. In spite of the stark life that it represents, the novel reveals an underlying moral purpose and a positive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns. Mistry, as a diasporic writer, holds literary thought and literary language in a fine balance that is as much an act of affiliation and establishment as an act of disavowal, displacement, exclusion and cultural contestation.

## 9.7 Summary

The novel, *A Fine Balance* begins with the accidental meeting of Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck Kohlah in a train. Emergency has just been declared in the country. Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck head for Dina's home where they will share lives for a while before their lives are irretrievably shattered. The two tailors are hired to enable Dina to earn a living through selling dresses on contract to Au Revoir Export Company. And Maneck is an old school friend's son, who lives as a paying guest in her apartment. The novel recounts the story of Dina Dalal from the age of twelve and the death of her father to the age of forty - two and the hiring of the tailors.

Dina struggles to eke out a living for herself. The acrimony that marks the relationship between Dina and the tailors at the start of the novel transforms itself during the course of the narrative to mutual respect and compassion. Ibrahim, the rent collector, who plays multiple roles of spy, blackmailer and deliverer of threats and harasser of tenants, carries a folder with many compartments and pouches to sort out these roles.

The novel also goes back in time to Ishvar and Omprakash's story. In this section, we are confronted with caste oppression at its starkest. Ishvar's father, Dukhi violates caste restrictions in attempting to make his sons, Narayan and Ishvar into tailors. This is a particularly moving section of the novel bringing to life the sordid conditions of the lower caste Indians living in the rural India. Even the upper caste women are not exempted from oppression. Through Dukhi's story we are brought back to the time of the Independence struggle in India. It is ironic that pledges of fighting against caste injustice were taken then but are still to be redeemed. Dukhi works towards an individual revolution - breaking with lifelong traditions - to apprentice his sons as tailors with Ashraf. In the end of the course "everything ends badly". Twenty years pass after independence and nothing changes. The untouchables are beaten up at random, their women are raped and their huts are burnt down. Omprakash dreams of revenge but both Ashraf and Ishvar know the futility of such dreams and instead decide to send Om to Mumbai.

With this move, a new phase starts in the lives of Om and Ishvar. In the city, it is class rather than caste that oppresses them. They are forced to stay in jhopadpattis that are mowed down. They are rounded up with the street beggars and forced to work as unpaid labor. Their attempts to live their lives with some semblance of dignity are frustrated at various points. Mistry's tone manages to let us see the dark reality behind the glamour of the Dream city, Mumbai. Their story ends pathetically with Om being turned into a eunuch and Ishvar's legs are amputated. They finally become beggars and are fed by Dina who has turned into an unpaid maid servant at her brother, Nusswan's home.

Maneck's story is the story of the ecological denudation of the Himalayas and the death of the indigenous enterprise through the entry of the multinationals. Maneck is sent to study air conditioning and refrigeration in Mumbai and meets the dynamic student leader, Avinash. Avinash really represents the voice that is silenced by Mistry's narrative. Mistry describes the brief spell of optimism, the formation of student bodies, the agents adopted and the resolutions passed. Avinash mysteriously disappears. The mysterious disappearance of Avinash meets the narrative logic of Mistry's novel: that everything ends badly.

The rebel lower caste villagers are tortured and murdered. The landlord manages to evict Dina. The victims of the forced sterilization programme do not get justice. The powers remain unaffected and the result is violence.

## **Answers to check your progress**

### **9.2 & 9.3**

1. The novel has as its milieu the "City by the Sea" - Mumbai or Bombay, a city marked by constant and permanent changes in its landscape, skyscrapers and in the people who inhabit it. Here more than anywhere else in India, one witnesses the lives of the people being governed and even enmeshed by globalization, by networks of new and foreign media images on the one hand, and by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, exploitation and homelessness, on the other.
2. Every atrocity that is known to have been committed during the Emergency occurs to Mistry's characters and the novel becomes a template for a stark and unsparing portrait of that time in India. With the curtailing of the fundamental rights of the people, everything became topsy turvy, the press was censored, with the new law MISA anybody could be imprisoned without trial and there were countless deaths in police custody.
3. Under the City Beautification Scheme, hutment colonies were demolished and millions were rendered homeless, a new strategy was formulated for beggary problem and the pavement dwellers were made to slog like bonded laborers.
4. The most brutal aspect of Emergency was that anyone, young or old, married or unmarried was compelled to undergo Family Planning Operation. Ration cards were issued only to those who had a Family Planning Certificate and people had to choose between food and manhood. Incentives like transistors were offered for this.
5. Everyone was suspect, everyone had to be investigated and suddenly new Student Unions sprang up which expected total submission to their demands and their codes of conduct. Students and teachers who voiced their honest opinion were promptly arrested and never heard of again.

6. In the totalitarian regime that existed during the period of Emergency (1974 - 77), a work force was organized - created - very much on the lines of slave workers. Beggars, pavement dwellers, tailors, carpenters, rag pickers, scrap dealers and hair collectors are all herded into trucks to be driven to work sites. There was brutality in the treatment of these bonded laborers is presented - their living conditions, food and clothing, the total disregard for even the minimum concern for human dignity or even life etc and its subjection seemed to be the sole aim and no one was expected to question it. Mistry draws a vivid picture of the reign of terror that was unleashed in the name of national security and welfare.
7. Ishvar and Om are picked up by the police from their rented footpath dwelling to work as construction workers as part of the City Beautification Project. Ishvar's protest that they are not street urchins or beggars falls on deaf ears. They are forced into a truck and are compelled to abandon their daily bread and butter for a number of days for reasons far beyond their control.
8. All the avowed promises of the Emergency to abolish bonded labor, child labor, sati, dowry system, child marriage and harassment of backward castes by upper castes never have materialized.
9. Narayan tries to assert his democratic right and cast his own vote instead of abetting the process of rigged elections. For his defiance, Narayan and two other 'Chamars' are forcibly gagged, flogged and tortured. Narayan's family for defying the existing social order pays an extreme price. Dukhi (Narayan and Ishvar's father), Roopa, Radha and the daughters are bound and burnt alive.
10. The author lucidly shows the involvement of the entrenched, insensitive bureaucracy in the demolitions of 'jhuggi - jhopris', forced labor camps and sterilization drives. Senior administrators from the Family Planning Centre admonish doctors for not achieving targets. Operations are conducted with partially sterile equipments due to the harsh reprimands of the bureaucrats who are only interested in achieving targets rather than demolishing human sufferings. The euphemism of 'efficiency' and 'the sense of duty' are used to ensure that the Sterilization Operations are preformed even under unhygienic conditions but the planned

target of sterilization is achieved.

11. The administrator represents the state machinery involved in brutal coercive sterilizations.
12. The Facilitator and the Motivator represent the corrupt bureaucracy that takes a hefty cut for providing basic amenities.
13. The Slum - lord and the Thakur are the agents of social repression, letting loose their goons on all those who try to break free from the chains of the strict codification of social groupings.
14. Bal Baba symbolizes the hold that ruthless god men have over an illiterate, superstitious populace whose monetary donations pander to the desires of the God man's body rather than the spirit.
15. The story of Avinash has strong allegorical undertones as it has parallels with the tragic murder case of the engineering student, Rajan, during the Emergency. The suicide of Avinash's sisters is reminiscent of the combined suicide of three young girls in India's industrial city of Kanpur, who could not bear to see their father's humiliation and social scorn for not being able to provide them respectable dowries for marriage.
16. The Indian government in the post - independence period has failed to resolve the basic problems of poverty, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and disease. A considerable percentage of people live below the poverty line leading a hand to mouth existence and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened. The writer draws a pathetic picture of near - naked people in Bombay slums, with meager possessions, lean, emaciated babies, hungry and crying.
17. Mistry gives us a glimpse into the evils of the Indian college campus', the shameful ragging, the nepotism in staff hiring, the bribery for admissions, the sale of examination papers, the special privileges for politicians' families, the government interference in the syllabus, the intimidation of the faculty members and the student politics in the campus.
18. The power in the novel is mainly of five types: exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient and integrative.
19. The Monkey Man likewise tortures his animals, the two monkeys Laila - Majnoo and the dog Tikka. The wretched animals perform antics to entertain people under the perpetual threat of beatings



from their master. Later, after the death of the animals, the Monkey Man substitutes two children. Thus he extends the cruelty into the human dimension.

20. In the novel, characters like Nusswan illustrate manipulative power. Nusswan runs the Shroff household after his father's death. From then on, he controls the other members of the family. Dina's young age and their mother's approaching senility make for their total dependence upon Nusswan. He therefore regulates Dina's money, dresses, education and friendships. Later this power is used to induce Dina into marriage. This move however does not work. After a span of time, with widowhood and subsequent penury, she is forced to approach Nusswan for help. Nusswan's monetary assistance helps him retain his hold over her.
21. Dina herself is not beyond manipulative moves. Ishvar and Omprakash Darji are desperate for jobs. Dina hires them to sew for her, at a meager wage. She is careful not to give them undue importance, even though they sustain her own existence. Dina does not allow the two to know her suppliers or market. To this end, she seals them, literally, away from business. She padlocks the front door when she goes to the export house.
22. The fourth category of power is "nutrient power". This is the power "for" the other, suggestive of a certain care and responsibility. This power generally manifests as paternalism. Nutrient power is also embedded alongside the other kinds of power. For instance, Dina's brother, Nusswan, in spite of his bullying and manipulation, obviously cares for her. He frequently helps her out during difficulties and concerned for her safety and health, her lonely life and future.
23. In Mistry, it is the government which is castigated as undemocratic and unpaternal. Throughout the novel, the Government's exploitative power, cruelty and the evil of juridical - political machinery is emphasized. The Government installed to protect actually robs, maims and kills its own people.

#### **9.4**

1. The first chapter recounts the story of Dina Dalal from the age of twelve and the death of her father to the age of forty - two and the hiring of the tailors.

2. The second chapter returns to the present and introduces us to the manager of Au Revoir Exports, Mrs. Gupta. Through Mrs. Gupta's approval of Mrs. Gandhi's actions, we are confronted with the complicity of the Indian business houses with the outrages committed during this period.
3. Ibrahim, the rent collector, who plays multiple roles of spy, blackmailer and deliverer of threats and harasser of tenants, carries a folder with many compartments and pouches to sort out these roles. Ironically, the landlord finally sacks him, ostensibly for wearing out too many folders but in truth because he has become a compassionate rent collector, an oxymoron in motion.
4. Ishvar's father, Dukhi violates caste restrictions in attempting to make his sons into tailors. This shows surprising courage in a man who has been socialized into accepting his position in the caste hierarchy unquestioningly.

During his childhood years, he mastered a full catalogue of the real and the imaginary crimes a low - caste person could commit and the corresponding punishments were engraved upon his memory. By the time he entered his teens, he had acquired all the knowledge he would need to perceive that invisible line of caste he could never cross, to survive in the village like his ancestors, with humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions. Dukhi works towards an individual revolution - breaking with lifelong traditions - to apprentice his sons as tailors with Ashraf. In the end of the course "everything ends badly". When his son, Narayan attempts to assert his right to vote, he is brutally tortured and then hanged in the village square. The Thakur decided that Dukhi's family deserves special punishment because he had turned cobblers into tailors and distorted society's timeless balance. Dukhi, Roopa, Radha and the daughters along with Narayan's corpse are burnt alive at the behest of the Thakur.

5. In the city, it is class rather than caste that oppresses Ishvar and Om. They are forced to stay in jhopadpattis that are mowed down. They are rounded up with the street beggars and forced to work as unpaid labor. Their attempts to live their lives with some semblance of dignity are frustrated at various points.
6. Maneck's story informs us about the ecological denudation of the

Himalayas through the forces of "development" and the death of the indigenous enterprise through the entry of the multinationals.

## 9.5

1. In this novel, Mistry does not only deal with the misery of common people and the brutality of tyrannical politics: he also describes the horrors of a government work - camp, the tortures in state prisons. In short all the humiliation, the suffering and the wrong that poor people have to suffer under fascist governments.
2. Rustom Kolah runs a small family business in the idyllic hills of North India. His specialty is the Kaycee (Kolah's Cola), which he makes according to a secret formula handed down to him over the generations. When the multi - nationals invade the hills, with their new - fangled technology and hard - hitting advertising campaigns Kaycee is on its way to a slow but sure death. Maneck exhorts his father to advertise, to adopt new technologies but to no avail. In Modernization there is the survival of the fittest. Industrialization and capitalism are responsible for progress, prosperity and the rising living standards and also for the angst of displacement and in extreme cases, even for aggression against self. These constitute the worst of modernism and find a poignant reflection in the novel.
3. Dina Dalal, Parsi widow lives in genteel poverty trying to maintain a fine balance between her financial independence and destitution. She seeks to employ two tailors to do the piece - work for an export company and have a paying guest stay in her tiny flat to supplement her meager income. Ishvar - Om, the uncle - nephew pair of tailors, who have come to Mumbai in search of an employment and the dream of returning home after having made a lot of money, come to Dina's flat in response to her search for tailors. Maneck, who has been flushed out of the hills has come to Mumbai for higher studies and finds the rat - infested students' hostel and ragging too much to bear and has come to Dina's shabby flat in response to her offer made to Maneck's mother of paying guest accommodation to 'a nice Parsi boy'. Thus the exigencies of displacement bring these four people together at Dina's home.

4. The diaspora of Om and Ishvar epitomizes the widespread phenomenon of casteist politics and communal riots uprooting whole populations of poor, ragged, unsuspecting and politically unawakened masses and casting them into new identities.
5. Maneck Kohlah, the young man from the pristine slopes of the Himalayas, is another victim of this sense of double displacement. Apart from the geographical transition from the secure recesses of the parental home, Maneck has to face the disturbing emotional displacement into urban college life. In an India trying to reconcile it to the Emergency, Maneck has to swallow the insults of seniors and has to endeavor to adapt himself to the repressive political atmosphere in college.
6. For Dina life is a series of emotional upheavals and relocations of emotional anchors. Traversing the road of life, she is a lonely figure who experiences shocking forms of abuse. This may be marked in the dichotomy between her brief marriage to Rustom Dalal, her fleeting affair with Freedom, her successful but short lived tailoring enterprise and the abuse at the hands of her brother, physical intimidation by her landlord, the collapse of her tailoring venture with Ishwar and Omprakash and her final humiliating return to her brother's house as an unpaid domestic maid. Dina's transition through life is cyclic in a sense. She begins life in her brother's house and after experiencing the vagaries of life, returns to it in a pathetic state of self - defeat.
7. Mistry presents a cross - section of Mumbai - the huge slum across the road wearing its malodorous crown of cooking smoke and industrial effluvia, the long queue for water, accompanied by quarrels, lack of basic amenities, open air toilets, the familiar sights of beggars with their begging bowls and the Beggar Master paying the police every week to avoid harassment. Mistry authentically portrays Mumbai and its social ills such as child labor and beggary problem.
8. The Chamars spent their life in obedient compliance with the traditions and of the caste system and survived with humiliation and forbearance as their constant companions. Buddha's wife refused to go to the field with the Zamindar's son so they shaved off her head and walked her naked through the square and Dukhi's wife was raped in the orchard. They were helpless victims and their

crimes were varied and imaginative; a Bhungi had dared to let his unclean eyes meet Brahmin's eyes; a Chamar had walked on the wrong side of the temple road and defiled it; another had strayed near a Puja that was in progress and allowed his undeserving ears to overhear the sacred shlokas. When Dukhi became the father of two sons, he feared for his family's safety and as a precaution, he went out of the way to be obsequious. The children of the low castes were denied the right to education; Ishvar and Narayan were canned severely when they entered the classroom. When Naayan wanted to assert his right to vote, he and his companions were hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree and the Thakur's men brutally killed them. Thus every possible atrocity is levied upon the untouchables.

### **Field work**

Collect information about the Emergency period and study its various impacts on the lives of the people of those contemporary times. Study the Parsi culture and try to locate the elements of Parsi culture in the novel, *A Fine Balance*.



