CHAPTER-II

Nation and Narration

Literature becomes the living embodiment that holds not only the happenings down the ages, but like the brook of Tennyson’s poem, it holds human life within the range of time. Literature embraces within it all that men have experienced, undergone, battled for and faced down the centuries. Literature testifies for time past and time to come. It throws man’s own frailty into the limelight through its everlasting nature.

Literature cannot remain uninfluenced by the social and political atmosphere encompassing it, for political awareness forms a crucial part of the artist’s consciousness as a human being. Politics in the novel has to be incorporated with the patterns of life traced, and has to function as the crux, fermenting the human story. Politics thus is to be presented in art through the medium of living men and women and their actions. When the fundamental urges and interests of people are disenchanted by an exploitive set-up, they get involved in the institutional limitations of their immediate environment.

Since early times, relations between literature and politics have been manifested in the organization of many literary interest groups that were formed to make the members’ work better known, to encourage production, to pressure governments and other patrons for support, and to secure an atmosphere in which writers can produce well and profitably. Such organizations have born and have died according to the energy of their members and the liveliness of the political and social issues with which they have been engaged.
This chapter is a record of the important political events reflected in Rohinton Mistry’s novels. The title ‘Nation and Narration’ borrowed from Homi Babha lays stress on how the national events become part of Mistry’s narration.

One must assume as well that the political interpretation of literary texts is best managed when the texts at hand probably invite that kind of approach. It may be that any novel can be profitably examined as a political document, but no one should suppose that a book's sense of itself is of no consequence in determining what it is. For Irving Howe the term political novel can at most “point to a dominant emphasis, a significant stress in the writer’s subject or in his attitude towards it.”(Howe 5). A combination of external circumstance and the ideas that erect an imposing perception of facts, will assume in political novels a determining force rarely present in other works and it is not just that a belated realist bearing witness to the experience of a country or a society.

A work of literature reflects the social forces that have made themselves felt to the writer, since the writer belongs to his/her society and unavoidably responds to such forces. Readers may indeed find a particular novel to have social implications, but this does not mean that the work was written to have this effect. Certainly such implications can be a healthy side-benefit to an otherwise attentive reading experience, but surely few writers really want these particular implications to be the only ones their work might have. The political impact of fiction means that there is some sort of broader social relevance, that is, the fiction reflects the society that produces them.
Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. There are critics and commentators in England and America who appreciate Indian English novels. More important is the fact that the very form of the novel is routinely called into question by its most ambitious practitioners in a degree unmatched in the other literary arts. And this is at least as true of ambitious political novelists as of any other kind.

In his essay “The National Longing for Form”, Timothy Brennan draws attention to what he calls ‘the nation-centeredness of the postcolonial world’. Brennan argues,

The composite quality of the novel cannot be understood only ethnically or regionally. The novels rise accompanied a changing concept of realism itself, which acquired its present association with the lower classes only after the Enlightenment when, as Auerbach describes, realism came to involve: the serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation. In other words, the novel brought together high and low within a national framework not fortuitously, but for specific national reasons. (52)
Many postcolonial novels set out to problematize rather than legitimize the nation. In such novels as Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*, to name just a few, we see the authors foregrounding the problems involved in bringing together the high and low within a national framework. The postcolonial novel differs, therefore, in some significant ways from the classic bourgeois realist novel of European lineage. Furthermore, the treatment of everyday reality is mediated by various ideological and political factors. Inequality and disenfranchisement related to class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, for instance, inevitably produce alienated and marginalized individuals. This normal state of things is intensified during periods of acute national crises when the struggle between marginalized and dominant groups in society is thrown into relief.

Politics has its place in our society, and some literature can reflect the feelings or ideas of the time. Post-independent literature, especially fiction, was forced to account for a perplexing reality. Freedom had been won but writers and intellectuals generally felt that the only change effected by independence was the change in the colour of the exploiter’s skin. The significance of the impact of recent political events on contemporary Indian Literature cannot be wholly dismissed. If nothing else such events have re-established politics as legitimate, perhaps even desirable, subject matter for literature. But it is up to the author to carefully craft his or her tale to mask these political feelings. The authors who have the strongest political opinions tend to be the worst at hiding them. Instead, they want their message to be brutally clear.
The Indian novels in English have developed from venturing to articulate the idea of an Indian nation to questioning the colossal Indian democracy. Since the death of Nehru in 1964 the nation saw the rise of less visionary and altruistic form of political leaders who are more interested in the immediate electoral gains to be derived from fostering special interest groups rather than seeking to support and serve the secular ideal. According to Kavita Matthai, the novel in India has had:

...to confront an authoritarian state-sponsored version of national identity and the erosion of the idealism that accompanied nationalism....In a situation where the official version is the only one, purporting to be the authentic version as well, the role of literature becomes crucial in releasing alternative versions. (57)

After gaining independence India had many challenges to face and many changes came over Indian life. Complications took place in social, political, economic and cultural spheres but India handled them, thoughtfully and adequately and progressed step by step. The fact of being independent and having its own identity impelled Indian English writing. It provided the writer with self-confidence, broadened his vision and sharpened his self-examining faculty. As a result of these developments important gains were registered, especially in fiction, poetry and criticism. Fiction, already well established, grew in both variety and stature.
Rohinton Mistry, whose forte is politics, is the leading practitioner of the political novel in India. Mistry has become one of the prominent writers of the post colonialist writing movement. He writes simple prosaic tales which is interwoven with political absurdity and about politicians and bureaucrats. In addition to the obvious political theme, Mistry shows his preoccupation with the Parsis in the postcolonial world. In all his novels the political turmoil of the outside world and the private torment of individuals are woven together. His fiction bears social purpose, and also succeeds in achieving a vivid interpretation of life. His novels deal with the theme of exploitation on the political, economic and social ground, taking mainly the Bangladesh war and Emergency as its background. It continued the tradition of social realism, stressing the necessity of social purpose in fiction. His works focus our attention on the dynamics of internal displacements and dislocations of class, gender, caste, and locality within the nation that are in turn over determined by the brutality of the nation-state at its most repressive.

Mistry's works examine a side of India not often seen elsewhere in literature. Critics have praised Mistry's ability to present a fresh perspective on his native land. His portrayal is markedly different from that seen in the bulk of the Indian canon written in English—a canon formulated by mostly white, colonial-era writers who tend to depict a romantic and sanitized version of an India they saw only from their cloistered communities.

*Such a Long Journey* is at once a more narrowly focused fiction and, in its depiction of life in modern India, more wide-ranging. This interesting novel tackles
several long Journeys- India’s transformation from the British colony to a scuffling, corrupt, mismanaged, constantly at-war democracy under Indira Gandhi. The novel is set in 1971, during the time of Pakistan's brutal but unsuccessful attempt to suppress the uprising in its eastern wing, the future Bangladesh, and against the backdrop of India's 1965 war with Pakistan over Kashmir and the 1962 defeat by the Chinese army. The text engages the readers with the increasing criminalization of politics in India and the rise of Mrs. Gandhi’s brand of real politics that effectively spelt the end of her father, Jawaharlal Nehru’s value-based practices in public life.

Mistry installs in A Fine Balance the state of Emergency as a vast behemoth under whose auspices all kinds of State and bureaucratic power spin into excess. The Emergency also provides the visible mantle under which traditional forms of power reiterate their hold upon village societies, for instance using its population policies to take away the reproductive capacities of untouchables. In the city, under the Emergency, the stigma of defilement gets a new interpretation, as its urban beautification programmes attempt to eliminate from view beggars and pavement-dwellers.

In Family Matters, like his other works, there is a political milieu, this time during Shiv Sena rule- post Babri Masjid turmoil of the 1990s. Mistry brings out the brutality of the Shiv Sena canon through numerous incisive remarks of his characters and by portraying a Muslim victim of the riots. At times it does feel like he has adopted a populist anti Hindu fundamentalist agenda through some stereotypical characters like Mr. Kapur and his Muslim protege Husain. According to Mistry the Shiv Sena has embarked
in India on a course of madness and he once again blames Indira Gandhi for the fundamentalism that pervaded in India then.

Mistry is generally critical of Mrs. Gandhi in his books. Interestingly, however, she is never referred to by name by any of the characters, and is instead called simply "the prime minister". At this juncture it will be appropriate to have a look at the biography of Indira Gandhi.

Indira Gandhi (1917-1984), the only child of Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru is a graduate from Oxford. The active participation of both her parents in the struggle for independence of India from the British rule drew her to politics at an early age. Indira Gandhi was the first woman ever elected to lead a democracy. She was the Prime Minister from 1966-77 and then again from 1980-84, till her death at the hands of her own bodyguards. The irony was, during the time that she served India as a Prime Minister, she was known as an autocrat as well as one of the most enigmatic leaders of India.

Indira Gandhi married Feroze Gandhi, a Parsi, in 1942. As it was an intercommunal love marriage, it was opposed by orthodox Hindus. Shortly after their marriage both Indira Gandhi and Feroze Gandhi were jailed for nationalist activities. After the release Feroze Gandhi became editor of The National Herald, a newspaper founded by Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the principal associate of her father during the period of his prime ministership (1947-1965). They had two sons-
Sanjay Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. The couple lived separated for a number of years during the 1950s as Feroze Gandhi launched his own political career in the Parliament and was often at difference with Jawaharlal Nehru’s policies and style. In 1959 Indira Gandhi became President of the Indian National Congress and in 1964 she was elected to the parliament. Meanwhile Feroze Gandhi rose to some eminence as a parliamentarian and a politician of integrity but found himself disliked by his more famous father-in-law, but Feroze died in 1960 before he could consolidate his own political forces.

After Jawaharlal Nehru’s death in 1964, Indira Gandhi was elected to Parliament for the first time, and she was Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the government of Lai Bahadur Shastri. Shastri died unexpectedly of a heart attack less than two years after presuming office and on his death in 1966, she succeeded as prime minister. Indira Gandhi with her amazing political skills and persistence assumed power and held the office of the Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977. She was admired after India's triumph in the war of 1971 against Pakistan, and the explosion of a nuclear device in 1974 which helped to augment her reputation among middle-class Indians as a tough and smart political leader. However, in 1973, Delhi and north India were stunned by demonstrations against high inflation, the poor state of the economy, extensive corruption, and the poor standards of living. In June 1975, the High Court of Allahabad found her guilty of using illegal practices during the last election campaign, and ordered her to vacate her seat. There were demands for her resignation from all quarters.
Mrs. Gandhi’s response was to declare a state of Emergency, under which her political opponents were imprisoned, constitutional rights abrogated, and the press placed under strict censorship. Meanwhile, her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, started to run the country as though it were his personal fiefdom, and earned the fierce hatred of many whom his policies had victimized. He ordered the removal of slum dwellings, and in an attempt to curtail India's growing population initiated forced sterilization, which quickly earned public indignation. Confident that she had incapacitated her opposition in early 1977, Mrs. Gandhi called for fresh elections, and found herself beaten by a newly formed coalition of several political parties. Her congress party lost badly at the polls. But, three years later, she resumed the office of Prime Minister. The same year, however, her son Sanjay was killed in an airplane crash.

She prospered on the famous slogan Garibi Hatao meaning "Remove Poverty" and that became the cry for one of her election campaigns. She had a dictatorial streak, and though urbane, she could rarely tolerate opposition; and she did, in many respects, irreparable harm to Indian democracy. Apart from her infamous imposition of the internal Emergency, the use of the army to resolve internal disputes greatly increased in her time; and she encouraged a culture of flattery and discrimination.

An even more severe threat to national unity came from the violent protests of members of the Sikh community in the Punjab against Mrs. Gandhi and her government. After the army had invaded the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the chief shrine of the Sikhs, which had been held as an armed camp by a group of militant Sikhs, she became the
target for Sikhs’ anger. “Operation Bluestar”, waged in June 1984, led to the death of
Bindranwale, and the Golden Temple was stripped clean of Sikh terrorists. However, the
Golden Temple was damaged, and Mrs. Gandhi earned the undying hatred of Sikhs who
bitterly resented her action in their sacred space. In November of the same year, Mrs.
Gandhi was assassinated, at her residence, by two of her own Sikh bodyguards, who
claimed to be avenging the insult heaped upon the Sikh nation. At her death, her older
son, Rajiv Gandhi was chosen by her party to succeed her and he was sworn in as head of
the Congress party and Prime Minister.

Indira Gandhi was remarkable for her ambition for personal power, her endurance
and political tenacity. While it is generally agreed that she was a very skillful politician
and that she was enormously popular with the masses, many others believed that her
drive for personal power, symbolized in the long domination of Indian politics by the
Nehru family, had weakened the democratic development (Somervill 24-43).

In 1991, Mistry published his first novel, Such a Long Journey, a story set in
India in 1971, at the time of the war with Pakistan which ended with the independence of
East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Dealing again with members of the Parsi community of
Bombay, Mistry strikes the opposition between the values of family and tradition and the
corruption of the outside world. Indian politics is the uncanny background of Gustad
Noble’s family life, as all the events of Indian history of the time mingle with Noble’s
private life. A moral man, the head of a loving family, Noble in his fifties, has to
experience a complete upheaval of his life, owing to the sudden blowing up of politics in
his smooth everyday routine. The adventures of this bank clerk, whose life is devastated by history are linked both to the situation of the Parsi community of Bombay in the seventies and to the larger horizon of Indian politics at the same time, characterized by a huge return of nationalism, by the corruption of Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party and the ascent of her inept son, Sanjay. In a vision which does not leave many hopes for the future, Mistry sees the India of 1971 as a country where ‘public latrines can become temples while temples can turn into dust and ruins’ (Journey 245). During his long journey, Gustad Noble meets sorrow and death, and disillusion for his son’s betrayal. He comes into contact with political corruption, he gets involved in communal riots, and finally Gustad realises that for him the real journey has just started, or, better, that certain journeys never end and must go on in any case, even without hope, even without knowing their goal.

Mistry’s story has a thorough Indian setting. It is not, perhaps, the most flattering depiction of India, but unfortunately a rather true one. In Such a Long Journey, Mistry hints at the highest level of corruption in politics in the postcolonial Indian world. Indira Gandhi is the true villain in Such a Long Journey. Through conversation of the characters that sometimes sound like history lessons, we learn some bits and pieces about Indian politics. Mistry launches numerous attacks on Jawaharlal Nehru, his moody temperament, the political shenanigans in which he was involved and especially his dangerously close relationship to his daughter Indira. We also hear Nehru’s feud with his son-in-law Feroze Gandhi, who had exposed scandals in the government. Jawaharlal
publicly reviled Indira’s husband, Feroze because the latter had denounced the political scandals in Jawaharlal's government.

The country’s beloved Panditji, everyone’s Chacha Nehru, the unflinching humanist, the great visionary, turned bitter and rancorous. From now on, he would brook no criticism, take no advice. With his appetite for philosophy and dreams lost for ever, he resigned himself to political intrigues and internal squabbles, although signs of his tyrannical ill temper and petulance had emerged even before the China war. His feud with his son-in-law, the thorn in his political side, was well known. Nehru never forgave Feroze Gandhi for exposing scandals in the government; he no longer had any use for defenders of the downtrodden and champions of the poor, roles he had himself once played with great gusto and tremendous success. (Journey 13)

Among other details, we are told how Jawaharlal Nehru ensured that his daughter would become Prime minister after him. Mistry subtly comments on Jawaharlal’s obsession concerning Indira, Indira, equally obsessed by her father, left Feroze, "her worthless husband " (13) in order to return to live at Nehru's.
His one overwhelming obsession now was, how to ensure that his darling daughter Indira, the only one, he claimed, who loved him truly, who had even abandoned her worthless husband in order to be with her father- how to ensure that she would become Prime Minister after him.

This monomaniacal fixation occupied his days and nights, days and nights which the treachery of Chou En-lai had blighted for ever, darkened permanently, unlike the blacked-out cities, which returned to light after the conflict ended and people uncovered their doors and windows.

(Journey 13)

There was even a rumour that his immediate successor, Lai Bahadur Shastri, had been poisoned by Indira’s followers.

After Lai Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister upon Nehru’s death, it seemed for a while that the stagnant waters of government would at last be freshenend and vitalized, despite the skeptic... The night the Tashkent Declaration was signed, Shastri died on Soviet soil, less than eighteen months after he became Prime Minister...

Some even claimed it was the new Prime Minister’s supporters who poisoned Shastri, so that her father’s
dynastic-democratic dream could finally come true:

(Journey 136)

However the most important background feature of all described in the latter part of the novel, is the Indo-Pakistan War of December 1971. This was triggered by a divided election result in the two ‘wings’ of Pakistan, predominantly Muslim but geographically and racially separate, after Partition in 1947. The larger force in West Pakistan, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and General Yahya Khan, refused to accept the election results in the East which had gone against them and ordered for the arrest of East’s victorious candidate and embarked on the suppression of opposition in the territory in an unprecedented clampdown. Brutal repression led to an enormous refugee crisis with, eventually, approximately ten million people fleeing across the border into Indian-controlled Bengal. With refugees continuing to pour into India from the troubled East Pakistan, Gustad wonders how long a poor country like India could afford to feed millions of more people. Of course, such an influx was inevitably a severe strain on India’s resources; one result was the Refugee Tax which pushed up prices, and which the characters complain about in the novel.

Then the price of Odomos went up, along with the price of every necessity and luxury from matchsticks to sanitary napkins. “This refugee relief tax, ‘he said,’ is going to make all of us into refugees.’ (Journey 99)
Furthermore, Mistry recalls the many upheavals afflicting Bombay and all of India in the 1960’s and 1970’s culminating in violence and war; sporadic riots, social unrest, the Indo-Chinese war and the reign of terror in East Pakistan that ended in the proclamations of the Republic of Bangladesh.

The catalyst is the fictional character of Major Jimmy Bilimoria. Jimmy, Gustad’s close friend from the ‘Khodadad Building’, suddenly disappears, leaving no other explanation than that he has embarked on a clandestine mission in the interests of national security. Eventually we discover that he is involved in the activities of RAW - the Research and Analysis Wing of India’s secret service. It seems that he is engaged in providing funds for the cross-border guerrilla groups. However, it is soon apparent that Jimmy has become deeply embroiled in an altogether more murky set of events involving the embezzlement of large sums of money. The outline of his story is based on that of a parallel historical figure - also a Parsi and, by all accounts, an agent of RAW - Captain Sohrab Rustom Nagarwala. The story line however is more centrally concerned with the events that had overtaken Nagarwala.

It will be quite relevant to mention the famous Nagarwala case here. Rustom Sohrab Nagarwala, a former Indian intelligence agent, withdrew Rs 60 lakh on May 24, 1971 from the State Bank of India and gave to a “man from Bangladesh” after the chief cashier at the Parliament Street branch in New Delhi got a call allegedly from Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India asking him to do so. Later on he was accused of mimicking the voice of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He claimed that he had received a phone call from the Prime Minister instructing him to hand over that large sum of money to a
messenger. This was never accepted by the Prime Minister’s office and Nagarwala was charged with embezzlement and arrested. He died in rather mysterious circumstances before he could be brought to trial. The missing sum of money was also connected with 1971 war between India and Pakistan, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh out of the ruins of East Pakistan. The opposition parties suspected that the money belonged to Indira Gandhi. They also alleged that it was not an isolated case. The investigating officer, D. K. Kashyap, investigating the case was killed in a car attack. The deal was facilitated by the Chief Cashier Mr Malhotra who was sacked from the bank service. Subsequently, he became the Chief Security Officer of Marati Udyog Ltd then run by Sanjay Gandhi besides securing 28 licenses for plying various types of vehicles in the national capital (Latif Gauba 142-144).

In the novel Gustad receives a troubling letter from Jimmy Bilimoria, whose request for aid will plunge Gustad into the morass of Indian politics and conflicting loyalties. And, as if the letter itself is a harbinger of disaster, other problems begin piling up. Sohrab refuses to go to IIT, the Indian Institute of Technology effecting the father and son quarrel, and Sohrab leaves home while Gustad disowns his son. His daughter Roshan falls ill and the tranquility of the family apartment itself is threatened when the municipal government requests some land in order to widen a road.

In his letter, Major Bilimoria asks Gustad to receive a package for him. The contents of the package jeopardized Gustad’s job as a bank clerk. The parcels he received contained a huge number of currency notes wrapped in brown paper. Gustad was
shocked by such a large sum of money. A letter from Bilimoria reassures Gustad that this was not black market money but government money and he was to open an account in his bank and deposit it there in the name of Mira Obili (an anagram for Bilimoria as pointed out by Sohrab) and the address was to be either Gustad’s or one of his post office box numbers in Delhi.

It would be too dangerous for Gustad to deposit this huge amount of money in his own account or in any other. So they decide to hide the money in the house till such a time when Gustad could hand it back to Bilimoria’s contact in Bombay, Ghulam Mohammed. The latter however, is out of the city and cannot be contacted- so the money remains with the Nobles.

Soon it becomes clear that the dead animals in the house’s proximity are a warning and are connected with the huge amounts of money collected on behalf of Bilimoria and not yet deposited into the bank as instructed by him. It is now clear that the note that followed the dead animals into the vinca bush meant that they had to get rid of the money. So Gustad decides to deposit it little by little so that nobody would get suspicious. However, this threat to him and his family leaves him feeling very betrayed and bitter. He feels let down by his friend for exposing him to such danger, ‘...like a brother I looked upon for him. What a world of wickedness it has become’ (142).

In this moment of trouble Gustad turns to Dinshawji for help and confides in him the story of Bilimoria, his letters and the money. Gustad emphasizes how helping
Bilimoria would contribute the national effort against Pakistan. With Dinshawji’s help the money in the alcove at Gustad’s home slowly depletes and finds its way bit by bit into the bank account. Dinshawji brings the news of Major Bilimoria’s dismissal from RAW on charges of corruption. Here Mistry juxtaposes facts with fiction and the newspaper report on Bilimoria’s dismissal is lifted almost verbatim, with just a change of names, from the reports in the press about the dismissal of the real life Nagarwala.

Following the recent judgement in the case of voice impersonator Mr Bilimoria, the RAW officer who defrauded the State Bank of sixty lakh rupees, the defendant’s request for a retrial was denied yesterday.

It is now learned that the head of the Special Investigation Team, appointed to determine if a retrial was necessary, had asked for more time to conduct a thorough review of the evidence. Soon after, he was killed in a car accident on Grand Trunk Road.

His replacement has brought the investigation to a rapid conclusion. The report finds that a retrial is not necessary.

Sentencing is expected to follow shortly.

(Journey 276-277)

Both Gustad and Dinshawji are now frightened about the money they have been depositing in their bank on Bilimoria’s behalf. Ghulam Mohammed tells him that the Major’s life is in danger and wants Gustad to withdraw all the money he has deposited
and send it back to Bilimoria. Gustad has thirty days to withdraw the money and return the package to Mohammed. Gustad leaves with the warning, ‘If the money is not delivered on time, things will go badly for all of us’ (205) ringing in his ears. The entire sum of money is finally returned to Mohammed who then entreats Gustad to go to Delhi to see Bilimoria who is being victimized by the authorities. A letter from Bilimoria carries a similar request and Gustad leaves with a promise to think it over.

‘It was his last chance,’ said Ghulam Mohammed. ‘But the courts are in the pockets of the ones at the top. Those bastards think we are stupid, that we don’t understand what it means when the chief investigator suddenly dies in a car accident.’ He clenched and unclenched his fist. ‘Now it’s just a matter of time. Please go and meet Bili Boy. Before they finish him off. Please.’ *(Journey 277)*

News from Mohammed once again indicates that Bilimoria has been sentenced and is very anxious to see Gustad. So Gustad finally makes the trip to Delhi. Gustad’s meeting with Bilimoria reveals Mrs. Gandhi’s sordid involvement in corruption at the highest levels in the Indian Government and the manner in which she used men like Bilimoria to further her own political ends.

‘Big... surprise... She was using RAW like her own private agency. Spying on opposition parties, ministers...
anyone. For blackmail. Made me sick. Even spying on her own cabinet. One of them... prefers little boys. Another takes pictures of himself... doing it with women. Bribes, thievery... so much going on, Gustad. RAW kept dossiers. On her friends and enemies. Where they went, who they met, what they said, what they ate, what they drank.’

(Journey 318)

Jimmy also gives Gustad a full length narration of how he was deceived by the Prime minister in giving a handwritten confession. Dying, Jimmy reveals to Gustad the true nature of the plot into which he has innocently been drawn. Indira Gandhi, Jimmy insists, is exploiting the threat of war to Pakistan to cover the diversion of the funds supposedly earmarked for insurgents in Bangladesh into purely personal projects.

‘Like a fool I agreed... trusted her. Then she said, maybe we should make our plan watertight... you can write a few lines just now. A confession. That you imitated my voice... because you wanted to continue helping Mukti Bahini....Any allegations, and she could stand up in parliament. With the written confession... that she was aware, and government was in control of the situation.... I wrote my confession... like an idiot. My respect for her... grown so much over the months. Such a strong woman.
Such a strong woman. Trusted her completely.’ (Journey 327)

The above instances have been mentioned to bring home the point that corruption is a phenomenon that afflicts almost all states as also the central apparatus. Second point relates to involvement of even Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers and many central and state ministers. The third point that manifests abundantly is that charge-sheets are diluted, enquiries politicised and proceedings delayed on flimsy pretexts.

The police report goes on to state that Mr Bilimoria has admitted he perpetrated the fraud in order to expedite aid to the guerrillas in East Pakistan. ‘The Mukti Bahini are brave and courageous fighters,’ the RAW officer is said to have written in his confession, ‘and I was growing tired of watching the bureaucrats drag their feet.’ He claims the idea was entirely his own, and his zealousness in helping the Mukti Bahini is to blame. (Journey 231-232)

Mistry also voices out the qualm that prevaded in the minds of the people through a footnote of the newspaper report.

A Footnote: While the alleged facts of this case are certainly unique, what strikes this reporter as even more

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unusual are the circumstances surrounding this highly imaginative crime. For example, assuming that Mr Bilimoria has the talent of voice impersonation, is it routine for our national banks to hand over vast sums of money if the Prime Minister telephones? How high up does one have to be in the government or the Congress Party to be able to make such a call? And was the Chief Cashier so familiar with Mrs.Gandhi’s voice that he accepted the instructions without any verification whatsoever? If yes, does that mean that Mrs.Gandhi has done this sort of thing frequently?

These questions cry out for answers, and till the answers are heard, clearly and completely, the public’s already eroded confidence in our leaders cannot be restored.

(Journey 231-232)

We are informed about the Swiss bank accounts of Mrs. Gandhi and her son. Indira Gandhi’s secret scheme for funding guerrillas in Bangladesh, while deceptively embezzling the money for her family’s use, is revealed by Jimmy.

But what about the leaders who do wrong? Like the car manufacturing licence going to Indira’s son? He said Mummy, I want to make motorcars. And right away he got the licence. He has already made a fortune from it, without
producing a single Maruti. Hidden in Swiss bank accounts.

\[\textit{Journey 81}\]

R.S. Pathak in \textit{Power politics and Politicians} attributes this pungent treatment that Indira Gandhi receives on Mistry’s novels to the “Supposedly ungenerous treatment of Feroze Gandhi” by Nehru and Indira (150). He is of the opinion that they always remained an eyesore with the Parsis. Pathak opines that Nehru and Indira Gandhi went further to offend the Parsis-Nehru with his socialism that went against the Parsi free enterprise and Indira with nationalizing the banks in 1969, that destroyed the Parsi hegemony in Banking. Dinshanji, in \textit{Such a Long Journey} feels that:

‘What days those were, \textit{yaar}. What fun we used to have.’ ..... ‘Parsis were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere only has been spoiled. Ever since that Indira nationalized the banks.”\textit{(Journey 45)}

Mistry shows an Indian’s knowledge about corruption, being an ingrained part of life at all levels in India. He reiterates how an ordinary citizen can get nothing done without bribes, if he has any dealings with the municipality, the police department or the politicians. Dr. Paymaster, the family physician of Gustad Noble, points out that the municipal corruption was only a microcosmic manifestation of the greed, dishonesty and moral turpitude that flourished at the country’s centre. He described meticulously how, from the very top, whence all power flowed, there also dripped the pus of putrefaction,
inflicting every stratum of society below. Mistry also provides a solution for the corruption.

... that our beloved country is a patient with gangrene at an advanced stage. Dressing the wound or sprinkling rose-water over it to hide the stink of rotting tissue is useless.

Fine words and promises will not cure the patient. The decaying part must be excised. You see, the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the gangrenous government at the centre is removed. (Journey 369)

With the rise of the extreme right-wing political parties like the Shiv Sena in Bombay which focused on the other: the religious other-the Muslims, the linguistic other-especially the Tamil speakers, and the regional other-all who come to Bombay from other parts of India and who according to the Sena, snatched the bread out of the mouths of the son of the soil. Mistry, like many other political analysts and novelists places the blame for this at Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India.

...How much blood-shed, how much rioting she caused.

And today we have the bloody Shiv Sena, wanting to make the rest of us into second-class citizens. Don’t forget, she started it all by supporting the racist buggers.’ (Journey 45).
**Such a Long Journey** traces in convincing detail, Gustad’s painful loss of innocence about the Government and his efforts in a chaotic time to sort out his responsibilities to his country and family. Thus **Such a Long Journey** is a novel written with the central theme of corruption in politics.

In **A Fine Balance**, the theme has been extended to take in the internal Emergency imposed by Mrs. Gandhi in 1975 to save her staggering government from increasingly strong attacks by the opposition parties. She declared Emergency to avoid being cast out of office and to crack down on her political opponents under cover of protecting the nation.

Opposition and criticism is the environment of all democratic governments and if one tries to suppress them, he is jeopardizing the very foundations of democracy. This is exactly what happened during the Emergency and for the very first time since India had been decolonized in 1947, the democratic institutions were suspended. The Emergency saw the deferment of the basic fundamental rights guaranteed to every Indian citizen by the Constitution of India. What followed was one of the most disgraceful chapters in independent India’s History.

Mistry’s **A Fine Balance** records this dark period with utmost honesty. In an interview to *The Times of India* soon after the publication of this novel, Mistry has said that after he finished writing **Such a Long Journey**, which he had placed in 1971: *It seemed to me that 1975, the year of the Emergency would be the next important year, if*
one was preparing a list of important dates in Indian History. And so it was 1975’ (Gokhale, October 27, 1996).

The oppressive measures under the Emergency were accompanied by Indira Gandhi’s announcement of a ‘twenty-point programme’ - claiming to improve the lot of the poor. The 20-Point programme promised to liquidate the existing debts of landless labourers, small farmers and rural artisans and extend alternate credit to them, abolish bonded labour, implement the existing agricultural land ceiling laws, provide house sites to landless labourers and weaker sections, revise upwards minimum wages of agricultural labour, provide special help to the handloom industry, bring down the prices, prevent tax evasion and smuggling, increase production, streamline distribution of essential commodities, increase the limit of income tax exemption to Rs 8000, and to liberalise investment procedures. Some progress was made, with some quick results in reduction of prices and the free availability of essential commodities (Somervill 114-121).

Indira Gandhi’s administration saw a dilution of the loyalty to Gandhian ideals and also allowed an over-riding expediency enter Indian politics in an exceptional way. The need for achieving economic self-reliance innately conflicted with the notion of democracy, and placed economic achievement above civil liberties.

Mrs. Gandhi’s Emergency focused on the twenty point programme, which included the removal of poverty - Garibi Hatao, population control and the beautification of cities. All these three points bounced back adversely on India’s poor as
the slogan covertly became the *Garibi Hatao* - remove the poor. Such a move would automatically make the cities more ‘beautiful’, so the ‘ugly’ poor were forcibly removed from the urban spaces. Mistry depicts the cruelty done to the poor and voiceless in the name of Emergency in his novel. 

Eventually the tailors’ slum is torn down by Mrs. Gandhi’s disciples in their beautification drive. The tailors and their friends salvage what they could from the debris. Dispossessed and evacuated they desperately look for shelter but are denied everywhere. Here we have Mistry detailing the ordeals of millions of Mumbai’s homeless citizens, whose plight has not changed dramatically for the better since the dark days of the Emergency. The tailors have to sleep rough on the streets, carrying their belongings in a trunk, until Dina finally relents and lets them keep it in her flat. She however, refuses to let the tailors live in her flat for fear of her landlord and her own class and ethnic prejudices.

The men, the ones who said they were safety inspectors. They tricked us. Sent by the government, they said, to check the colony. At first the people were pleased, the authorities were taking some interest. Maybe improvements were coming-water, latrines, lights, like they kept promising at voting time. So we did as they told us, came out of the shacks. But once the colony was empty, the big machines went in...They said it’s a new Emergency law. If
shacks are illegal, they can remove them. The new law says the city must be made beautiful. *(Balance 291)*

Mistry shows us the perception of the rich and ‘well settled’ on the slum clearance in his novel. Dina’s brother with his large house to shelter could only identify these evacuations as a mere city beautification programme.

...poverty is being tackled head on. All the ugly bustees and filthy jhopadpattis are being erased. Young man, you are not old enough to remember how wonderful this city once was. But thanks to our visionary leader and the Beautification Programme, it will be restored to its former glory. Then you will see and appreciat*(Balance 365)*

On the contrary the middle class could comprehend the homeless state of the destitutes. Even Sergeant Kesar, the person who does the job of clearing the pavement dwellers is highly inflicted by his conscience.

Tonight, Sergeant Kesar had decided he was going to tolerate no non-sense, his job was getting harder by the day. Gathering crowds for political rallies wasn’t bad. Rounding up MISA suspects was also okay. But demolishing hutment colonies, vendor’s stalls, jhopadpattis was playing havoc with his peace of mind. And prior to his superior’s
formulating this progressive new strategy for the beggary problem, he had had to dump pavement-dwellers in waste land outside the city. He used to return miserable from those assignments, get drunk, abuse his wife, beat his children. Now that his conscience was recuperating, he was not about to let this nose-dripping idiot complicate matters.

(Balance 316)

Ishvar and Om find a makeshift dwelling in the streets, under the awning of a pharmacy. But they are soon rounded up and driven out of the city along with a bunch of beggars, to provide free labour to an irrigation project - another outcome of civic beautification scheme, wherein pavement dwellers were strategically eradicated. Dina’s work comes to a standstill. The tailors are rounded up with other homeless people and yanked off to the beggar’s camp where Mistry unleashes one horror after another not only on Om and Ishvar but also on the readers. This journey to the Beggar’s Camp, enables Mistry to introduce the character of the Beggar Master into the narrative - the man who plays an important role in the finale of the action. With the Beggar Master and his ill fated charges, the reader is transported into the world of children whose limbs have been deliberately mutilated to make them better objects of pity and hence more successful beggars.

BeggarMaster, the gangster of an army of beggars and disfigured people is the closest personification of the functions of the state in the book. Through his character, Mistry is able to account the coarse nature of the wild and overstrained post-colonial
Indian state. He is suggesting a move away from the restricted one-sided logic of economic development to a more compassionate and broadminded democratic state. Also very troubling is the way the BeggarMaster describes human nature, saying, “People forget how vulnerable they are [...] this hungry and cruel world could strip them, put them in the same position as my beggars.” (19)

Mistry also depicts the infamous vasectomy camps. The tailor’s residence in the slum is illegal without the all-important validation of the ration card, which naturally evades them as they have no way of proving an uninterrupted stay in their current home. This results in the unstable nature of their existence in the city, where like their comrades in poverty, they remain unacknowledged and invisible but perform services without which the city would grind to a halt. The quest for a ration card and a feasible existence, even though on the margins of the city, introduces the tailors to the current, politically motivated, supposed solution for India’s over population vasectomy. The Ration Officer advises them to undergo vasectomy; the reward for this sacrifice of their fecundity would be not only a ration card but also a transistor radio. “But there is another way to get the ration card, if you are interested...........If you let me arrange for your vasectomy, your application can be approved instantly.” (177). Rather sarcastically they are told that some men underwent the operation twice to reap double benefits. The tailors despise this offer and reject the validity that demands such a high price from them. This is the first time that the text brings in the problem of overpopulation and Mrs. Gandhi’s son Sanjay’s ingenious solution to it - vasectomies to all the men in the crucial age-group.
In addition to showing the people that the family planning statistics had received a positive boost in the Emergency, the Prime Minister also had to appear in the public eye at rallies. The tailors and their friends in the slum are rounded up and herded into a bus to attend one such rally were they see the sycophantic manner in which the local politicians and dignitaries receive Mrs. Gandhi. The incentive offered being a merely rupees five and free tea and snacks - a sad reflection of the poverty that co-existed with wealth in the city. For these poor men the spectacle provides much amusement and these people feel entertained but see through the pretense: ‘See? said Rajaram, ‘I told you its going to be a day at the circus - we have clowns, monkeys, acrobats, everything’ (261). The political rally comes out as a big farce and the people who were rounded up to the rally aren’t even returned to their respective homes or slums. It is interesting to note that since the organizers of the rally for Indira Gandhi couldn’t keep up their promise, of five rupees and some snacks, how they could expect the people to understand and accept Indira’s false promises!

The Emergency encouraged some politicians to check the rampant high birth rate by forced and unethical vasectomy and other cruel methods. Eventually Government workers are forced to produce two or three people from the village for sterilization each month, otherwise they will not be paid. So the upper caste political boss has the school teachers, tax collectors, and food inspectors pay him a bribe. Whoever pays the most is allowed to be considered finished with the round-up for sterilization that month. As the government gets more insistent on sterilizations, finally all the men in the village are
rounded up by force to be sterilized. When a doctor hesitates to sterilize a young man without children, all it takes is a whisper from a political boss threatening his job.

You see, government employees have to produce two or three cases for sterilization. If they don’t fill their quota, their salary is held back for that month by the government. So the Thakur invites all the school-teachers, block development officers, tax collectors, food inspectors to the clinic. Anyone who wants to can bid on the villagers. Whoever offers the most gets the cases registered in his quota. *(Balance 511)*

Mistry’s text goes on to show how this vasectomy drive intensified during the Emergency imposed by Mrs. Gandhi between 1975 and 1976 and proved to be the collapse of the tailors. The vasectomy programme coupled with the ‘Beautification’ campaign undertaken by Sanjay’s acolytes in the Youth Congress, which attempted to cleanse the Indian urban spaces of its ‘unsightly’ poor, drive Ishvar and Om to their ultimate tragedy.

Ishvar and Om are forcibly picked up from the town square, where they had gone to find Om a bride, to fulfill the daily quota of sterilizations. The operations are done in less than sanitary conditions and Ishvar’s legs then become affected with gangrene and both his limbs have to be amputated. The description is particularly grotesque as the
author mentions “From the groin to the knee the flesh had become black”(530). The political thump of the village Zamindaar, Thakur Dharamsi is quite evident here when he directs the doctor to operate upon Om too, who is a mere youth, waiting to get married. There is no escape from this vicious forced sterilization scheme, the pet project of Indira’s ‘beloved son’, Sanjay Gandhi.

It is not that Emergency was only a dark evil. It had to its credit a few positive achievements also. In its early days, the Emergency created a climate of agreement among the people, for they had no longer to tolerate the nuisance of strikes and agitation. Their daily lives became peaceful and less expensive because the prices of essential goods came down. Stringent punctuality in offices, trains and buses were a great relief to the masses. Tax evasion, smuggling and black marketing reduced almost dramatically. The atmosphere of the country seemed for a while to be encompassed by a sense of discipline. Artist M.F.Hussain celebrated it by projecting Indira Gandhi in a painting as Goddess Durga riding a tiger. P.N.Dhar in his book *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency” and Indian democracy* has described the Indian Emergency “a systematic failure” in which “the democratic substance started deviating from the form long before 26 June 1975”(224)

Most characters in the novel seem indifferent or hostile to the Prime Minister and her Emergency policies, but a few characters support her views. Mistry uses upper-middle class characters like Nusswan, Dina’s businessman brother, Mrs. Gupta and
Thakur Dharamsi to show the effects of this sense, which was not exclusively restrained
by the government, but supported by intellectuals and the upper middle classes as well,

Mrs. Gupta, owner of Au Revoir Exports and Dina’s employer, expresses delight
at the Emergency. “Thank God the Prime Minister has taken firm steps, as she said on the
radio. We are lucky to have someone strong at a dangerous time like this.”(74). There
were more glad tidings for her, the minor irritants in her life were also being eradicated.
And she happily announces that the Prime Minister’s declaration of the Internal
Emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition, along with thousands
of trade unionists, students, and social workers. When Dina notifies that the court found
the Prime Minister guilty of cheating in the election, Mrs.Gupta immediately replies:
‘..that is all rubbish, it will be appealed. Now all those troublemakers who accused her
falsely have been put in jail. No more strikes and morchas and silly disturbances.’
(Balance 73). She then dutifully imitates the Prime Minister’s slogans:

The Need of the Hour is Discipline and Indiscipline is the
mother of chaos, but the fruits of discipline are sweet.
Neither the lower nor the middle classes have more than a
superficial understanding of the politics of the Emergency,
although the middle-classes seem to sense their class
interests in supporting it. (Balance )

A Fine Balance is the quintessential political novel. It takes as its subject some of the
most downtrodden, oppressed and exploited people in Indian society. Through his
characters, Mistry presents us with a snapshot of a nation in crisis. On the other hand we have Nusswan, Dina’s brother, who is full of praise for the Prime Minister:

At the best of times, democracy is a seesaw, between complete chaos and tolerable confusion. You see, to make a democratic omelette you have to break a few democratic eggs. To fight fascism and other evil forces threatening our country, there is nothing wrong in taking strong measures. Especially when the foreign hand is always interfering to destabilize us. Did you know the CIA is trying to sabotage the Family Planning Programme?” (Balance 366)

Exactly like Mrs.Gupta, the other bourgeois character in the novel Nuswan also despises the thought of Worker’s Union and he is all praise of the Emergency which could check these Unions. He says:

“The important thing,” said Nusswan, “is to consider the concrete achievements of the Emergency. Punctuality has been restored to the railway system. And as my director friend was saying, there’s also a great improvement in industrial relations. Nowadays, he can call the police in just one second, to take away the union troublemakers. A few good saltings at the police station, and they are soft as butter. My friend says production has improved
tremendously. And who benefits from all this? The workers. The common people. Even the World Bank and the IMF approve of the changes. Now they are offering more loans.” *(Balance 367)*

Also skulking in this story is the shadow of history, India’s colonial past that continues to irk the postcolonial present in the form of the bitter heritage of the partition what Mistry has described in relation to Maneck’s own birth:

..but long before that eagerly awaited birth, there was another, gorier parturition, when two nations incarnated out of one. A foreigner drew a magic line on a map and called it the new border; it became a river of blood upon the earth... And the orchards, fields, factories, business, all on the wrong side of that line, vanished with a wave of the pale conjuror’s wand *(Balance 203)*

This brutal partition had impacted negatively upon the fortunes of the Kolah family who were economically impoverished by the new borders, though not physically threatened by it as their Parsi identity, neither Hindu nor Muslim, provided them with an immunity that left them untouched by the slaughter of the partition. Farokh complains about the uncertainty of Mountbatten’s decision which leaves him struggling against an
anonymous bureaucracy in his fight for his lost land. At the same time they were economically ruined as their assets were now on the other side of the new border.

Mistry also explores the impact of globalization on community and its implications. The complex and often technical topic such as globalization is articulated in his fiction in such a way that it is accessible to a broad community. He brings forth in *A Fine Balance* how globalization disrupts community and social capital, despite the increasing recognition of its role in upgrading the livelihood of the populace. Mistry drifts us off to the mountain home of Maneck Kolah. The new capital class in post-Nehruvian India of the 1970s, ensured the further waning of the Kokhs’ limited wealth, by ushering in the multinational consumer goods against which Farokh’s cola was no competition. This is a reference to the cola giants who were later in the same decade, banished from Indian markets, by the government that succeeded Mrs. Gandhi’s. The cola companies only re-entered the liberated Indian market in the mid-1990s. However, for Maneck, this seals his exile from his beloved mountains as his father sees no future for him there.

But the giant corporations had targeted the hills; they had Kaycee in their sights. They infiltrated Mr. Kohlah’s territory with their boardroom arrogance and advertising campaigns and cut-throat techniques. (*Balance* 218)
Mistry also gives the pathetic picture of the Himalayan town, which has been sacrificed to the altar of economic development. In the name of bringing modernization, roads were built that polluted the town and ruined the serene and lush environment.

In *A Fine Balance* Mistry uses a very descriptive, no-holds-barred approach and does not ignore any of the disgusting atrocities of the Emergency. His realist viewpoint and writing style shines through his portrait of the Emergency which was studded with forced sterilizations and vasectomies brought home with sinister Family Planning clinics and distribution of radio transistors, the City Embellishment program “Remove THE Poor, Save the Country” which led to the elimination of slums to make way for Five Star Hotels or more lucrative designs. We could also find strong comments about MISA-Maintenance of Internal Security Act, an offspring of Emergency throughout the text:

Two professors who chose to denounce the campus goon squads were taken away by plainclothesmen for anti-government activities, under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. Their colleagues did not interfere on their behalf because MISA allowed imprisonment without trial, and it was a well-known fact that those who questioned MISA sooner or later answered to MISA; it was safer not to tangle with something so pernicious. (*Balance* 244)
With the Emergency, everything is upside-down. Black can be made white, day turned into night. With the right influence and a little cash, sending people to jail is very easy. There’s even a new law called MISA to simplify the whole procedure. (Balance 295)

“What’s MISA? Asked Dina.

“Maintenance of Internal security Act, madam. Very convenient. Allows detention without trial, up to two years. Extensions also available on request.” (Balance 560)

Alienation, however, is not a characteristic of the diasporic subject alone. Inequality and disenfranchisement related to class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, for instance inevitably produce alienated and marginalized individuals. This normal state of things is exacerbated during periods of acute national crises, when the struggle between marginalized and dominant groups in society is thrown into relief. Caste, though a paramount factor in Indian nationalist and postcolonial politics, has not been tackled by too many Indian writers in English except a few like Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi and Girish Karnad. The Emergency though was the gravest, was not the only crisis that Indian democracy had to face. Linguistic conflicts, regional secessionist movements, communal tensions and riots and political violence had often made its existence rather precarious. A fairly large section of the population is deprived
of the benefits of democracy, particularly their right to a share of the wealth of the nation. That they remain in the margins of the democratic process can hardly be wished away.

It is crucial to realise that Mistry’s portrayal of Hindu culture is not an impartial ethnographic account of Indian society. He suggests that stark injustices are inherent in the practice of caste. The inhumanity of untouchability is severely criticized as contributing to an erosion of meaning in the lives of Dukhi, Narayan, Ishvar and Om. An example for the cruelty and arbitrariness that characterize their treatment by their betters is illustrated by the following quote:

For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned, though not to death - the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambhir was less fortunate; he had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress. Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord’s field, had been forced to eat the landlord’s excrement in the village square. Dhiraj tried to negotiate in advance with Pandit Ghanshyam the wages for chopping wood, instead of settling for the few sticks he could expect at the end of the day; the Pandit got upset, accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows, and had him hanged. *(Balance 108-9)*
After his sons Ishvar and Narayan have been beaten up for entering the village school, Dukhi appeals to Pandit Lalluram because he has faith in the Brahmin priest of whom it is said that “even an untouchable could receive justice at his hands” (112). However, Dukhi has to realize that justice is a concept which he as an untouchable does not have a claim to. Being outside society, Dukhi is also considered outside the scope of justice. Mistry’s portrayal satirises Pandit Lalluram as an unmannered, gluttonous reactionary who is not interested in justice for all:

Relying on this legendary reputation for justice, Dukhi sat at Pandit Lalluram’s feet and told him about the beating of Ishvar and Narayan. The learned man was resting in an armchair, having just finished his dinner, and belched loudly several times during his visitor’s narration. Dukhi paused politely at each eructation, while Pandit Lalluram murmured ‘Hai Ram’ in thanks for an alimentary tract blessed with such energetic powers of digestion. (112)

The injustice done to Ishvar and Narayan and their futile appeal to justice deprive Dukhi of meaning and satisfaction with the life he leads as an untouchable. Because the system disregards his hope of transcending himself in his children, Dukhi, for the first time in his life, questions his identification with the order of caste. He revolts, and eventually transgresses the restrictions of caste, a reaction that becomes manifest in the decision to remove his sons from the immediate impact of discrimination.
“Those things, yes. But what about the more important things? Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper-caste bastards still treat us worse than animals.”

“Those kinds of things take time to change.”

“More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like.”

*(Balance 143)*

Post-Independence India has seen much religious and ethnic violence. How much of this hatred seems to be fomented by political leaders? Dukhi observes bitterly "that at least his Muslim friend treated him better than his Hindu brothers" (115). Roopa’s midnight forays to steal fruit and milk from upper-caste homes and lands offer us a glimmer of the kind of courage that the daily ordeal of survival required in caste-dominated villages. But before long she is made to pay for her actions by having to prostitute herself to the man guarding an orange grove. Similarly, Dukhi defies prevailing caste restrictions by sending his sons off to the city to become tailors.

What is this disease? You may ask. This disease, brothers and sisters, is the notion of untouchability, ravaging us for centuries, denying dignity to our fellow human beings. This disease must be purged from our society, from our hearts,
and from our minds. No one is untouchable, for we are all children of the same God. Remember what Gandhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk. (Balance 107)

In a powerful retrospective sequence that concluded in 1969, Mistry traces the cause behind the eventual displacement of Ishvar and Omprakash from their native village by the river. Om and Prakash's father grew up as "untouchables" in a small village of India. When India obtained its independence in 1948, caste distinctions formally were abolished. Castes were rigid occupational groups that people were born into and couldn't move out of. The new government of India said caste distinctions were illegal, but they continued to exist in reality. The two brothers were born into an untouchable caste that skinned animals and tanned leather. The upper caste landlords in the village beat up the untouchables in order to keep them subordinate. They were beaten when their "unclean eyes" met the eyes of an upper caste Brahmin, when they walked on the wrong side of a temple road and supposedly defiled it, or when they went too near a prayer meeting, overhearing the sacred text.

Prakash's father dares to ask for his own election ballot, instead of just giving his fingerprint and allowing the landlord to vote for him. In response, the upper caste landlord sends his goons to whip the father, urinate on him, put burning coals put on his genitals, and then stuff the coals in his mouth. The goons then go on a rampage beating
up untouchables at random in their quarter. The family of Prakash's father is pursued, his
two grandchildren are knifed to death, and then the house of the family is set on fire,
burning up the six in it. This event, as well as the decline of the tailoring business in their
provincial town, precipitate the migration of the two surviving members of the family,
Ishvar and Omprakash, to the city by the sea, which is not identified but which one may
deduce to be Bombay.

The fictional murder of a Chamar family in 1969 or 1970 has parallels with
similar incidents that occurred in 1981. In 1981, many so called ‘untouchables’ were
killed in several villages in Uttar Pradesh. Two of these massacres, one in Delhi,
followed by another a few days later in Sarhupur — received extensive publicity. The
killers, who were Thakur Rajputs, had just one message to send through these murders
that the untouchable Jatav cobblers had to learn their place in society and the caste
hierarchy. This is also the message that Mistry’s Thakur Dharamsi wished to hurl to the
untouchable Chamar families who had sought democratic equality in defiance of caste
hierarchy.

Though the storyline starts out in the “city by the sea”, which one can easily
identify as Mumbai, the author adds that “they could have been anywhere” (Balance 4).
This, the author does, to inform as well as warn the readers, that the horrors that follow
the characters in Mumbai are not local, but a global haunt for the underprivileged. This
brings to the reader, the unsettling thought and confirmation, that for the marginal people
“Living each day is to face one Emergency or another.” (Balance 571)
Mistry brings a real picture of how the elections have been reduced to a mere devise. In India elections are nothing but a farce.

On election day the eligible voters in the village lined up outside the polling station. As usual, Thakur Dharamsi took charge of the voting process. His system, with the support of the other landlords, had been working flawlessly for years.

The election officer was presented with gifts and led away to enjoy the day with food and drink. The doors opened and the voters filed through.

“Put out your fingers,” said the attendant monitoring the queue.

The voters complied. The clerk at the desk uncapped a little bottle and marked each extended finger with indelible black ink, to prevent cheating.

“Now put your thumbprints over here,” said the clerk.

They placed their thumbprints on the register to say they had voted and departed.

Then the blank ballots were filled in by the landlords’ men. The election officer returned at closing time to supervise the removal of ballot boxes to the counting station, and to testify that voting had proceeded in a fair and democratic manner. *(Balance 143-144)*
The first discussion of the Emergency starts off in the book with this:

“Dinabai, what is this Emergency we hear about?” “Government problems - games played by people in power. It doesn’t affect ordinary people like us” (Balance 5). This shows, to the reader, that the common man was alienated from the working of the democracy and did not really associate himself with the various instruments that the government used. The poor rather wanted to stay away from it and hoped or maybe believed that he would remain unharmed. Mistry is ingenious in bringing up this quaint notion, that democracy was a luxury, reserved only for the elites, and then harshly, but rightfully dismissing later in the book! Mistry exposes the most horrifying facets of the Emergency.

There is another shock that awaits Maneck, before his death. When he comes back to India in 1984, for his father’s funeral, he is a witness to mob violence and arson against Sikhs in New Delhi, as Indira Gandhi has been murdered by her Sikh bodyguards. He picks up old newspaper at home to find it rife with attacks against Indira over human rights violations and other misconducts during the Emergency. But these attacks are short-lived and Indira Gandhi is duly exonerated as she is re-elected Prime Minister in 1980, after having lost the democratic elections called in 1977, right after the Emergency.

It was in these old papers that Maneck found news about Ayinash, his idealistic activist friend who had gone missing during the Emergency. It was, reported by the police that he died in “a railway accident”. But the reporter uncovering Avinash’s story, who had examined Avinash’s corpse, said that the injuries were consistent with other
confirmed incidents of torture. He concluded that Avinash was tortured and killed in police custody for anti-Emergency and anti-Indira slogans and demonstrations. Such was the situation during the Emergency that along with all civil liberties the fundamental rights were taken away from the common man. The police had become an ally in the Governments disheartening record of human rights abuse. Those entrusted with the protection of the poor had become their worst enemies! Avinash’s death, forced his three sisters to commit suicide to save their father from the financial hardship as well as social, stigma of not being able to provide dowry for his daughters. This is the psychological trauma that Avinash’s old parents have to go through. This is just one story out of the many ghastly tales that Mistry brings to us.

Valmik Rao, who like Avinash, is a rebel who often remarks against Emergency, loses his eyesight as well as voice. The dramatic prose of this editor, lawyer, political slogan writer, summarizes the pitfalls of our history, which is riddled with selective memory and short term amnesia. It selectively ignores the repercussions on the poorer citizens of the society. Rao offers a bitter comment on Indira:

The Prime Minister cheats in the election, and the relevant law is promptly modified. Ergo, she is not guilty. We poor mortals have to accept that bygone events are beyond our clutch, while the Prime Minister performs juggling acts with time past. (Balance 553)
This novel displaces the notion, which most intellectuals held at that time, that the kind of democracy practiced in India had brought freedom only to the privileged few and thus, the poor would not be affected by the curbing of such freedom. This logic was often used to condone the Emergency, arguing that it did not harm the poor, rather it was imposed to bestow greater benefits upon them and in essence for their own good. It was looked upon as a necessary and equitable force, which was required to ‘fix’ the problem of the post-colonial Indian state, which had been a constitutional experiment since the demise and departure of the British Empire (Dodiya 37).

In the most coveted January 24, 2002 Winfrey talk show meticulously cited in <http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/A-Fine-Balance-Discussion-Highlights/5>, Mistry expressed his views about Emergency and Indira Gandhi:

The system was out of control. And it went out of control because the rule of law was suspended in a bad move by Indira Gandhi, a brilliant person, a good leader, who did a lot of good for the country. But I think when The Emergency was declared, she had become frustrated by the obstacles presented by this slow and messy and tedious process of democracy. We have to admit that democracy is messy. But it's the only way, or you see what happens. ...

The villain is injustice. And that's the villain anywhere in the world where there is discontent and suffering. What
does this say about ethnic and religious loyalties, as opposed to personal ones. (5)

It would be equally interesting to note what Justice Jag Mohan Sinha, who had pronounced the famous judgement on 25 June 1975 unseating Mrs. Gandhi, has to say about it now. He calls Emergency as “the blackest period of post-independence India”. But at the same time he goes on to observe that violation of fundamental rights is still continuing on a large scale. In his own words: “There is no official Emergency today, yet the atrocities persist. It appears we have learnt no lessons.. .These are dangerous portents, and unless we take serious notice today to rectify these evils, the much maligned Emergency may recur, albeit in a disguised form.” (qtd. in *The Hindustan Times*, June 18, 2007)

Rohinton Mistry seconds Justice Jag Mohan’s view that in individual life lifting of the Emergency has made little difference.

Of course for ordinary people, nothing has changed.

Government still keeps breaking poor people’s homes and jhopadpattis. In villages, they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are made. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after nussbandi is performed. Living each day is to face one Emergency or another. (*Balance* 581)

In *Family Matters*, the focus is shifted from the 1970’s and the years of the Emergency under Mrs. Indira Gandhi to more recent times. In the post-Babri Masjid
Bombay, Shiv Sena’s religious fanaticism has been augmented by the Hindutva principles of BJP. Bombay was renamed Mumbai in 1995. Like his other works, the setting is Bombay, this time during Shiv Sena rule post Babri Masjid turmoil of the 90s. Mistry brings out the brutality of the Shiv Sena regime through numerous incisive remarks of his characters and portraying a Muslim victim of the riots. At times it does feel like he has adopted a populist anti Hindu fundamentalist agenda through some stereotypical characters like Mr. Kapur and his Muslim protege Husain. But really, it is the sad outcome of any kind of fundamentalism, or orthodoxy, that the novel brings out in the end. The story is set, again, in Bombay and focuses on the past and present life of a retired professor, Nariman Vakeel, and his difficult, complicated familial relationships. Like Mistry's other works, the novel has been praised by reviewers for both its intimate portrayals of individuals and its universal, sweeping themes and concerns. Mistry consistently demonstrates in his fiction that he is a writer who is able to produce both the sharply focused close-ups and broad landscapes of humanity.

Germaine Greer had publicly said that she hated *A Fine Balance* for its portrayal of ‘a dismal, dreary city’, a city that did not match with the one she had found on a teaching assignment on which she had spent four months in Mumbai (qtd. in *A Flavor of India*, June 1, 2002, smh.com.au). When the Australian writer Germaine Greer attacked *A Fine Balance* on British TV - “I hate this book,” she proclaimed. “It’s a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible?” - Mistry responded by calling her comments “asinine” and “brainless.”
In *Family Matters*, he goes back at Greer again, enlisting a character named Vilas to the cause of deriding those who dared attack a novel about the Emergency. Mistry settles score in *Family Matters* and Greer is firmly put in her place by Yezad’s friend Vilas.

A while back, I read a novel about the Emergency. A big book, full of horrors, real as life. But also full of life, and the laughter and dignity of ordinary people. One hundred per cent honest- made me laugh and cry as I read it. But some reviewers said no, no, things were not that bad. Especially foreign critics. You know how they come here for two weeks and become experts. One poor woman whose name I can’t remember made such a hash of it, she had to be a bit pagal, defending Indira, defending the Sanjay sterilization scheme, defending the entire Emergency- you felt sorry for her even though she was a big professor at some big university in England. What to do? People are afraid to accept the truth. As T.S. Eliot wrote, ‘human Kind cannot bear very much reality.

*(Matters 210)*
In this way Mistry exposes himself to attacks from detractors who might find his own distance, in time and space, from the city and people he writes about as disenabling as he does the brief acquaintance of Greer with Bombay.

In *Family Matters* published in 2002, Mistry returns to Bombay and the Parsi world with a vengeance. From his Canadian point of vantage, Mistry has viewed the life of a middle class Parsi family in Bombay in the mid 1990s. The old *bête noir*, the Shiv Sena, is still around but this is the post Babri Masjid Bombay where the religious chauvinism of Shiv Sena has been augmented by the pan Indian militant Hindutva of the BJP. The focus has thus shifted from the 1970s and the years of the Emergency under Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to more recent times. Hence the diasporic time wrap has been minimized to a considerable extent. However, the ‘reality’ captured here of Bombay, renamed Mumbai in 1995 by the Shiv Sena that had won the state level elections, is still largely based on heresay and there is still a heavy dependence on newspaper reports of these years, as noted earlier in the case of *A Fine Balance*.

Also, a little disturbing for someone who has lived through the tumultuous period from 12 December 1992 to 12 March 1993 is that there is only a passing reference to the series of bomb blasts that rocked Bombay on the latter date. Mistry’s political consciousness and acumen thus beg comparison with another diasporic book on that same troubled and shameful time that Bombay went through - Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Rushdie’s in - the - face tackling of the complicity of the Shiv Sena in the Hindu - Muslim riots that rocked Bombay in the wake of the demolition of the Babri
Masjid in Ayodhya in Northern India, by militant Hindu mobs, while the state administration stood by as mute witnesses, is also handled by Mistry in his book. Also missing is any elaboration on the suspicion of the involvement of Islamic fundamentalists, in nexus with the underworld, in the Bombay blasts. One could of course say that this is because the focus is on the personal rather than the political, but the political is allowed to intrude in a major way into the text in the manner in which it impacts on the professional life of one of the central characters - that of Yezad Chenoy. It is through Yezad that the reader comes in contact with his office attendant, Hussain, the victim of the post - Babri Bombay riots and Mr.Kapur, his boss, a victim of the 1947 (partitioning of India) Hindu - Muslim clashes. Even in the starting pages of the novel Mistry starts with his sarcasm on corruption. “Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks. Right, chief?” (Matters 31)

In this third novel there are no comments on the polluted congress, as India is now facing a completely new regime under BJP. But still Mistry wanted to confirm to his readers that the new government is no different from the old and he erases beliefs for betterment, if any.

“Maybe the BJP and Shiv Sena coalition will improve things,” said Jal. “We should give them a chance.”

Yezad laughed. “If a poisonous snake was in front of you, would you give it a chance? Those two parties
encouraged the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri
Mosque.” “Yes, but that was...”

“And what about all the hatred of minorities that Shiv sena
has spread for the last thirty years.” He paused to take a
long swallow of his Scotch and Soda. (Matters 31)

When Nariman uncurls his ageing and frail limbs, and in blithe disregard of the
injunctions laid on his movements, leaves the apartment for his usual evening walk,
when his step-daughter Coomy asks, ‘How many people with Parkinson’s do what you
do?’ (3), he shrugs of her fear by saying, ‘I’m not going trekking in Nepal. A little stroll
down the lane, that’s all’ (3). He counters Coomy further by pointing out the dangers lurk
indoors as well as outdoors. This brings into the text, the first mention of the Babri
Masjid riots. The reference here is to the burning down of an old Parsi couple by rioting
Hindu mobs, under the mistaken impression that fleeing Muslims had been given shelter
in that building. However as Coomy points out even in spite of the fact that Bombay
burnt for months after the razing of the mosque in Ayodhya, ‘How often does a mosque
in Ayodhya turn people into savages in Bombay? Once in blue moon’. (5)

As for the sub plots, Yezad’s life at the sport’s good store and his coffee shop
friends, gives Mistry the opportunity to berate the religious fundamentalists and indulge
in secular. However, this does tend to drag a bit and gets a bit tedious. What does provide
a bit of spice to the tea shop gossip is the manner in which Mistry uses the opportunity to
get back.
These days you never can tell who might be a Shiv Sena fanatic, or a member of their Name Police. It is my understanding that some Shiv Sainiks have infiltrated the GPO, subjecting innocent letters and postcards to incineration if the address reads Bombay instead of Mumbai. *(Matters 53)*

In *Lessons*, the short story collection, there is a passing remark to Shiv Sena by Kersi’s mother:

The postman rang the doorbell the way he always did, long and continuous; mother went to open it, waiting to give him a piece of her mind but thought better of it, she did not want to risk the vengeance of postmen, it was so easy for them to destroy letters; workers, nowadays thought no end of themselves, strutting around like peacocks, ever since all this Shiv Sena agitation about Maharashtra for Maharashtrians, threatening strikes and Bombay bundh all the time...’ *(231)*

In *Family Matters*, Rohinton Mistry beautifully colors a contemporary Bombay peopled with characters whose lives are filled with mundane—but no less grand—struggles and accomplishments. Mistry makes use of Yezad’s plot against his employer to
foreground the Shiv Sainiks of Maharashtra who practice corruption. Mistry tells us that in post- Babri Masjid Bombay, people were terrified at any stranger, taking him to be a Sena man: “From Shiv Sena, listing names and addresses- that’s how they had singled out Muslim homes during the Babri Mosque riots. Probably planning ahead for next time”.

(Matters 106)

Belonging to a minority community himself, Mistry has taken up the task of voicing the issue and concerns of other minority groups as well. If in A Fine Balance it is the chamaar community and their brave efforts to exist under the cruel, sometimes even inhuman circumstances and the dire poverty of the street dwellers and the ways in which the rich and the powerful exploit them that are highlighted, in Family Matters, Hussain, the Babri Mosque riot victim appears. He speaks little, but his painful part, of losing his entire family in the riots and his tormented present are subtly projected by Mistry.

“Sahab, in those riots the police were behaving like gangsters. In Muslim mohallas they were shooting their guns at innocent people. Houses were burning, neighbours came out to throw water. And the police? Firing bullets like target practice. These guardians of the law were murdering everybody! And my poor wife and children ... I couldn’t even recognize them...” His voice was a sob now and he stopped speaking.
“Hahn, Hussain, it was shameful,” said Mr. Kapur, writhing in his chair. “More than three years have passed, and still no justice. Shiv Sena polluted the police. And now Shiv Sena has become the government.” *(Matters 155)*

There is also a reference to the Hindu-Muslim riots in *A Fine Balance*:

Disturbing things were happening around them. Strangers belonging to a Hindu organization that wore white shirts and khaki pants, and trained their members to march about like soldiers, had been visiting the district. They brought with them stories of Muslims attacking Hindus in many parts of the country. “We must get ready to defend ourselves,” they said. “And also to avenge ourselves. If they spill the blood of our Hindu brothers, this country shall run red with rivers of Muslim blood.” *(Balance 122)*

On reading this the readers feel equally disturbed.

In the novel, Mistry brings in details about the *matka* games, and how the humble casino in the street corners of Bombay funded the fundamentalists group.

People think it’s not so bad when Shiv Sena extorts money from rich businessmen- ‘donations’ for their ‘charity’ work.

But Matka also finances Shiv Sena machinery. And Matka
money paid for the plastic explosives with which the terrorists blew up the stock exchange. You see the paradox? The enemies of the nation and political parties that claim to be defenders of the nation, all rely on the same source.

(Matters 207)

Mistry as in A Fine Balance brings facts into fiction. Here he gives one more example of how polluted the politicians are in the democratic country of ours:

They recalled, for Vilas and Yezad’s benefit, a particularly successful performance about the Minister for Telecommunications, whose house had recently been raided by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The puja room had yielded two trunks and twenty-two suitcases, crammed with cash and arrayed behind the shrine of Laxmi. (Matters 330)

Though Mistry is all against the corrupted and polluted India, he wants all the youngsters who dream about a foreign land, the greener grass on the other side, to understand their rich motherland. Yezad, though once wanted to emigrate to Canada, now wants his sons to understand the real beauty of their homeland.
Their father said if they ever tasted this insipid foreign stuff instead of merely reading about it in those blighted Blyton books, they would realize how amazing was their mother’s curry-rice and Khichri-saas and pumpkin buryani and dhansak. What they needed was an Indian Blyton- to fascinate them with their own reality. (Matters 117)

Mistry’s novels as they appear are more of a social and political satire, which covers the entire Indian society of the postcolonial days. His works are mainly aimed for an educated westernized Indian readership and secondly it is meant for the western audience who are interested in the other side of India. In this manner Mistry has placed indo English literature at par with any other western literary masterpiece.

Also, since diasporic studies are being read along with postcolonial approaches, there is a tendency to see it as a literature of resistance and one ‘interested in the category of nation’. However with a diasporic writer like Mistry, the concerns are different. It’s essentially one of representation, of imaging India to the world, and of representing the self as “seen and remembered against the backdrop of the part”. (Bharucha 9)

Mistry has challenged official historical truths, launched vituperative attacks on petty nationalism and the censorship of the state, all the while wrapping his readers in the realist swirl of dreamscape and fairytale in which the conventional is challenged with astonishing wit and intellectual daring. His resentment towards the corrupted Indian
politics especially towards Mrs. Gandhi’s suspension of India's democracy during the Emergency and his bitter animosity toward her is vivid while he preaches about the problems of contemporary India. It needs an Indian-born and Indian-bred writer to appreciate and evaluate the current situation in India from a sympathetic as well as critical point of view at a given period of time. The voice of this 'other' India may not be as immediately accessible or aesthetically appealing to an international readership, but surely this is a matter of taste rather than value.

The work of a novelist is to entertain and, of course, to act as a witness for his times and if he does both, the reader will be enthralled, and tricks with language, experiments with form are secondary. India is a country of a billion people which is often portrayed as the world's biggest democracy. It is true that India has many political parties and they alternate in power in various states. But Mistry, through his novels proves that the reality of India is far from democratic. His novels give a vivid feel of this reality. The narrative of repression and victimization to be found in Mistry’s novels bring it into concordance with that of the most potent of nationalist myths viz. the powerlessness of the oppressed classes.

Mani Meitai in his essay ‘Such a Long Journey and Its Critical Acclaim’ feels that:

Rohinton Mistry comes out as a critical realist so far as the treatment of social reality is concerned... In his consciousness of the social and political aspects of a
particular kind historical period he emerges as a progressive writer, but in his vision of a larger rhythm of life, in which all forms of human happiness and misery are seen woven inseparably in the development of the central character towards a climax, he shows his allegiance to literature’s timeless values, independent of narrow commitments, whether political or regional. (84)

The fictional world Mistry creates in his works is thus no utopia of any kind. It is the world in which all forms of corruption, knavery, hypocrisy, tyranny, ugliness and decay have become the order of the day. Thus the society which is depicted is completely deprived of resilience. Mistry’s shock at the sight of stinking human condition and rampant corruption turns him into being a realist, who is obliged to expose the world around him. Wars between nations, the complete lack of commitment on the part of the big powers and so on, show the degenerating political scenario in the international politics. The nationalistic fervor in the novelist makes him at times a ruthless critic of the corrupt government. His nationalism is above petty selfishness. In his consciousness of the political and social aspects of a particular historical period he emerges as a progressive writer.

His narrative discourse rambles between the personal lives of his protagonists and the historical realities, bringing forth the forgotten moments of history. He has articulated his hostility to the categories and images of casteism and fundamentalism. His narratives
resist the hegemony of imperial version of history and acknowledge, as Edward Said’s terms ‘the marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories.’ (Said 69)

Mistry’s works deal with some of the most critical moments of the recent time, providing space to the alternative events, which vie for our attentions. They recreate in a way, a dynamic flux of history, a history in which the modern individual struggles to find a meaningful place in his/ her own way. In this process, he has used the technique that indulges in mixing of a family saga with stark political satire. By doing so, he tries to crystallize a few moments of history on a fictional canvas and create a sort of kaleidoscopic vision of history is achievement lies in his intermingling of historical elements with fictional elements. The intensity of his creative whole acts as a work of fiction and at the same time holds a mirror to the concerned period of Indian history as well. His fiction is not a mere record of historical and political events but an artistic recreation of them.