CHAPTER III

Rohinton Mistry-Transcending the self
Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi Zoroastrian emigrated from Bombay to Canada in the year 1975. At the very outset this was a diasporic displacement, as this movement was governed by the element, in the search of fresher and greener pastures.

However, from the racial and historical point of view, the Parsis had already experienced diasporic displacement when they were forced out of Iran. The sought refuge in India and landed on the banks of Diu (Gujarat).

**III: Rohinton Mistry’s Birth and His Works:**

Rohinton Mistry was born in the year 1952, in Bombay (India). He graduated from the University of Bombay in the year 1974, with a degree in mathematics. Later he moved to Canada with his wife and settled in Toronto. He worked as a bank clerk for sometime. He also took up the study of English and Philosophy, at the University of Toronto.

Mistry had a flair for writing and his literary bent of mind made him express himself through the literary medium. Mistry published his short story entitled ‘One Sunday’ in the year 1983. This short story went on to win the first prize in the ‘Canadian Hart House Literary Contest’.

He wrote yet another short story ‘Auspicious Occasion’, which won the ‘Annual Contributor’s Award’ from the Canadian Fiction Magazine. The literary pull was so strong in Mistry’s life, that he gave up his job and with the aid of the Canadian Council Grant, took up to full time writing. This included the name of Rohinton Mistry, a writer from South Asia, in the Canadian literary galaxy.

Although, Rohinton Mistry’s literary contribution is less in quantum, the quantity of his work speaks wonders. His wonderful works have left readers all over the world spell bound and today Mistry is recognized as a towering literary personality.
His literary works include:


### III:ii Awards:

Rohinton Mistry has been conferred with a number of prestigious awards and prizes. His novel *Such a Long Journey* was short listed for the ‘Booker Prize’ and the ‘Trillium Award’. This novel went on to win the ‘Governor General’s Award’ and ‘The Common Wealth Writer’s Prize’ for being voted the best book; and ‘The Smith Books First Novel Award’.

*A Fine Balance* won ‘The Governor General’s Award’ and ‘The Giller Prize’. Surprisingly this book was also short listed for ‘The Booker Prize’. Among the other awards received were the ‘Los Angeles Times Award’ (1996) and ‘The Royal Society of Literature’s Winfried Hotby Prize’.

Mistry’s *Family Matters* was awarded ‘The Kiriyama Prize’ for literature. This novel was short listed for the Booker Prize. Strange but true, all the three novels of Rohinton Mistry were short listed for the Booker Prize but unfortunately and surprisingly couldn’t make it.

### III:iii Mistry, the Writer:

What makes Rohinton Mistry different from the others is the fact that he always attempts to move from ethnic enclosures to wider transcultural spaces. This stands him apart very significantly. An indepth study of Mistry’s works help us to comprehend the issues that he has taken up in a better light. Themes such as identity crisis, locating oneself in the
historical perspective, aspect of multiculturalism, insider-outsider status are all presented with intricate and subtle delicacy.

Rohinton Mistry delves deep into the Parsi world and portrays the Parsi identity, ethnicity and the Parsi psyche very poignantly. The various hurdles the Parsis face time and again, in addition to the challenges that they accept is something that Mistry presents through his works. Mistry is totally into the Parsi world and proudly states that his writings on the Parsis will, ‘preserve a record of how they lived’. The Parsi ambiance with all its rich culture and tradition is brought to the fore. The glimpse that we get of the Parsis and the world is not only wonderful but also awe-inspiring. The Parsi community in India or elsewhere is an ethnic minority and the ethnicity is something that the Parsis die hard at preserving. This community has been peripheralized for centuries and thrown into the background. Mistry’s works directly bring the marginalized community into the foreground.

One thing that deeply troubles Mistry is the declining number of the Parsi population. He positively states that this community stands on the verge of extinction. He goes on length and states the various factors contributing towards this decline.

Mistry voices his concern over the same in an interview with Dick Bennet. He states:

There are only 1,20,000 Parsis in the world. So it is not threat or delusion that they are on the verge of disappearance. What are 60,000 in a city of 12 million? And it is a pity when anything disappears from this world, any species, man, animal or insect.

### The Parsi Dislocation:

Dislocation/displacement is an aspect experienced by all Parsis. They were uprooted from their own land, Pars, in Iran and forced to seek refuge in India.

A close study shows that dislocation takes place due to two reasons—one out of force and the other out of choice. Mistry experienced a double displacement. Moving to Canada was something done entirely out of his free will.

In spite of Parsi dislocation, history proves that the Parsis have been placed in positions of honour and privilege in India. They enjoyed a place of pride especially during the British Raj. In spite of all this, the truth is, the Parsis have faced threat from various quarters. A feeling of insecurity looms large over them. In spite of their exposure to various cultures, they do not forget their ethnic selves and literally refuse to give it up.

Parsis, today, aim at relocating and reorienting themselves in India. Unable to make a journey literally to his native land, Mistry, undertakes a literary journey and in this process aims at recreating and rewriting his homeland from the historical and political point of view.

Mistry’s visits to India are very rare and the rare visits undertaken help to revitalize him. Regarding Mistry’s visits to India and the purpose of the visits, Cyrus Mistry, his brother says that the visits of India are meant to:

> re-familiarize himself with the sights, sounds, smells that would hence forth people in his works.

(Sunday MID-DAY. Oct 27th, 1991)
III:v Unhomed:

Rohinton Mistry has not severed his emotional ties with India. Although, he is physically far away from home land, his emotional longing is intense. Memories of home literally haunt him. Being an immigrant, like many others, Mistry is neither at home in the new land nor the homeland. The term ‘unhomed’ can be very significantly used here to express the status of the immigrants. Here the immigrant confronts a new culture, which is all the stranger. The consciousness of the identity construct seems to be at the core of all things. This feeling and realization of the aspect of being ‘unhomed’ creates conflict and plays havoc with the psyche of the person.

The conflict works at various levels. There is a need to assimilate in the present and at the same time maintain the culture, customs and traditions of the home. A desire to image the homeland to the rest of the world becomes a burning urge. They long for something that is irretrievably lost.

It is exactly here that a writer has to work extra harder. There is a need to justify many things. Honest efforts are needed to combat the hurdles created by time, space and distance. Without authentic efforts, an immigrant writer as Salman Rushdie states from Imaginary Homelands deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost.

(Rushdie 10-11)

Mistry deals with matters typical to our lives. He goes ahead and proves that even the specific has a universal implication.
III:vi Other Issues:

Quest for the self is yet another feature reflected in Rohinton Mistry’s works. There is a need to find out the real self from within. Mistry also brings about elements of nostalgia and reminiscence, which acts as a shield to get away from the world of reality. Characters frequently go into the world of immigration and illusion and seek solace there. Frequent appearing issues in his writings are love, hatred, selfishness, greed, family values, religion and its implications.

Mistry, being an immigrant, writes about all that he has experienced in the new land. Although, he is far away from India, he has not broken his ties with her. This brings to mind the words of Ashish Gupta who in an interview with Veena Singh reassures his attachment with his mother land. He says:

_I haven’t severed my links with India. As the connection grows weaker, the longing grows stronger. I think I am missing something._

(Jain 212)

The relationship that Mistry shares with his mother land (India) is very special. Treasuring this deep with in himself, he drives home to the readers many aspects unheard and unseen about so far.

All the literary compositions of Mistry strike awe within the readers and impart a genuine heart rendering moral.

As a matter of convenience, only two of his works have been taken up for the purpose of this research. They are:

Tales from Firozsha Baag is a collection of short stories, which marks the advent of Mistry’s literary journey. He takes a voyage back home and his memories come alike from India. In spite of being away from India for such a long time, he floats back on the waves of memory and recreates quite a ripple.

A Fine Balance is a thought-provoking tale, which drives the point about maintaining a balance in life. Instead of cribbing about life, what is needed is to keep working at the wheels of life. If stretched out of proportion, the consequences can be drastic.

III:vii Tales from Firozsha Baag:

Tales from Firozsha Baag comprises of eleven stories. The Firozsha Baag is a housing complex, which shelters a number of Parsi families. The life of the Parsis in all its colours is pointed. The rich and the varied patterns of the Parsi life are brought to the readers. Some of the stories have elements of humour and present the conflicting elements between the traditional and modernity. The passions, sentiments, emotions and sensibilities of the people are finely brought to the fore. The characters presented in the stories are all ordinary men and women, from different walks of life, who counter the ups and downs in life.

Mistry with his an eye for detail, creates local colours. He is an insider as well as an outsider to Firozsha Baag. He is an insider to Firozsha Baag, Bombay and his vignettes are naturally authentic. However, he distances himself by immigrating to Canada and portrays characters in a detached manner.

S. Ramaswamy, in an article “Local colours in Tales from Firozsha Baag” states:
Remembering, re-enacting, re-creating that place-time-people with accuracy, understanding and insight is the vision of Rohinton Mistry.

(Ramaswamy 54)

III:vii:i Auspicious Occasion:

The first story in the series is the ‘Auspicious Occasion’. This story had earlier won ‘The Annual Contributor’s Award’ from the Canadian Fiction Magazine.

The chief characters are Mehroo and her husband, Rustom who is twenty years older to her. As Mehroo comes from an orthodox Parsi family, she strictly adheres to all the age old customs, prayers, and ceremonies and also observes all the important days on the Parsi calendar. All the above mentioned is brought home to the reading public through the loving character of Mehroo.

Even as a child Rustom hits hard at the Bombay Municipal Corporation among various other things. Time and again he explained to Mehroo about how to keep a house maid without complaints. He liked to speak about the psychology of the gungas.

(Mistry 08)

The feelings of the Parsis towards the Parsi panchayt at which they consider inefficient and the relationship that these marginal Parsis share with the mainstream Hindus in India is also effectively portrayed.
There is an incident when Rustom travels by bus. Some ‘ghaati’ passenger (that is how the Parsis refer to the general public) spat out paan juice, which landed on Rustom’s clothes

Saala chutia spat paan on my dugli and you think that is fun.

(Mistry 17)

This statement by Rustom creates ripples of tension in the crowd. Hadn’t he acted on an impulse, he would have been physically assaulted by the public. Reducing himself to the status of an old clown, he found an escape from the angry mob.

This incidence points out to the degradation of the Parsi community in the post colonial India. As Nilufer Bharucha asserts:

This incidence focuses on the confrontation between the Parsi identity versus the Indian identity.

(Bharucha 74-75)

Quest for identity is also found in this story. Rustomji gets nostalgic and talks about the Social Service League and the work done under its banner while at college. This was done all with the purpose of identifying himself with the mainstream Indians. Realizing the marginal status of the Parsi community, he lets all that into the background and begins to live life according to his own terms.

The story ends with the murder of the Dustoor at the fire temple and Mehroo and Rustom once again resigning to the predestined fates.
**III:vii:ii One Sunday:**

Mistry very successfully brings out the conditions of the Parsis during the 1960’s and 70’s. A number of characters are found in this story -- Najamani, Boyce brothers (Kersi and Persi), Tehmina and Francis.

Francis, the odd man out in the Parsi residential colony, did odd jobs for the residents. All the Parsis presented here belong to the lower middle class and struggle to keep up their elite status.

The Boyce brothers always move about with their cricket bat performing a great many endeavours like killing rats, chasing thieves and playing cricket too.

Once the Boyces follow Francis to the Tar Gully, all armed with their cricket bats. Here they encounter the locals waiting for the final matka draw, which will decide their destinies. On seeing the Boyces with cricket bats at night they taunt

*Parsi bawaji! Cricket at night? Parsi bawaji!*

*What will you hit, boundary or sixer?*

(Mistry 35)

When Francis, mistaken for a thief is found, he is covered with kicks and blows. This sickens the boys and they move away with Francis. They realize that kicking or smashing someone with the bat is not similar to killing a rat. They realize that they are not so strong after all. Kersi rips off the rubber grips and cord from his bat.

*Soon, the cord lay on the floor in a black tangled heap, and the handle looked bald, exposed, and defenseless. Never before had Kersi seen his cricket bat in this flayed and naked state. He*
stood up, grasped the handle with both the hands, 
rested the blade at an angle to the floor, then 
smashed his foot down upon it.

(Mistry 38-39)

Kersi smashing the bat shows his anger, frustration and disgust. The Parsis always exhibit a sense of racial superiority and the breaking of the bat could symbolically expose the final inability of the Parsis to identify themselves with the main stream Indians.

III:vii:iii  The Ghost of Firozsha Baag:

This story deals with Jacqueline, a Catholic ayah and her encounter with a ghost. Being a non-Parsi, we get a glimpse into the Parsi world from another perspective, from a different angle. She works as an ayah in a Parsi household and hates it when her employer calls her Jaakaylee. She says:

Now it has been forty-nine years in this house as ayah, believe or don’t believe. Forty-nine years in Firozsha Baag’s B Block and they still don’t say my name right. It is so difficult to say Jacqueline? But they always say Jaakayl.

(Mistry 44)

The Parsis always preferred Goan ayahs for their babies. They did not trust anyone else for this work. Being a part of the colonial elite they considered this to be a part of their heritage.

Jacqueline talks about her life and says that no matter however sincerely she had worked for the last 49 years, she could not win the
complete trust of her master. Whenever they went out, she remained out on the staircase, terrace or corridor, but never alone in the house; her employer, like all Parsis never trusted their maids with the house keys. She talks about her life in the following words:

_No ayah gets key to a flat. It is something I have learned, like I learned forty-nine years ago that life as ayah means living close to floor. All work I do, I do on floors, like grinding masala, cutting vegetables, cleaning rice. Food also is eaten sitting on floor, after serving them at dining-table. And my bedding is rolled out at night in kitchen-passage, on floor._

(Mistry 45)

One Christmas eve, she went to church and returned at two pm. Not wanting to disturb the family, she spread her bedding by the staircase and it was this time that she encountered the ghost for the first time.

This romance with the ghost continued for a pretty long time.

_Yes, the bhoot came but he did not bounce any more upon my chest. Sometimes he just sat next to the bedding, other times he lay down beside me with his head on my chest, and if I tried to push him away he would hold me tighter._

(Mistry 48)

Jacqueline meets the church priest and he told her to recite the prayers thrice, and this would solve all her problems.
At the end of the story, we have the anti-climax. Jacqueline is standing on the balcony with her head covered and seeing her, the mistress mistakes her for a ghost and shouts bhoot! bhoot! This incident has another positive side to it. Jacqueline realizes that there is nothing like the ghost and is relieved.

The mistress is now in a trance and the Parsi priests are called upon to scare away the ghosts.

The story makes an interesting reading and it’s funny to note that it is the women who are captivated by the ghost.

Other elements found in the story are superstition, erotism, and passion for food.

III:vii:iv  Condolence Visit:

Yesterday had been the tenth day, dusmoo, after the funeral of Minochar Mirza. Dusmoo prayers were prayed at the fire-temple, and the widow Mirza awaited with apprehension the visitors who would troop into the house over the few weeks.

(Mistry 59)

Mistry is critical about those people who visit the homes of the bereaved. Very often instead of offering condolences, these visitors are merely nuisance.

Daulat grieved the death of her husband Minocher for a short period but was glad that he died peacefully in his sleep. However, all the hidden grief and pain would come to the fore with the visits of the condolence bearers.
For bearers of condolences and sympathies she would have to answer questions about the illness, about doctors and hospitals, about nurses and medicines, about X-rays and blood reports.

(Mistry 61)

Repeating the same details again and again was a painful affair. To escape this Daulat thought of leaving the place but this could make the gossip mongers active. She even regretted not accepting the tape recorder from Sarosh, who came from Canada.

It could be handy, she thought with bitterness, to tape the details, so squeeze all of her and Minocher’s suffering inside the plastic case, and proffer it to the visitors who came propelled by custom and convention.

(Mistry 61)

Daulat breaks all the age old Parsi customs and traditions. An oil lamp is kept burning by the bed side of the dead, which is put off after four days. This ritual helps the soul to sever ties with the physical world and travel to the other world. However, Daulat keeps the lamp burning, thereby inviting raised eye-brows from the neighbours. The burning lamp reminds Daulat of her dear husband, the wonderful time they spent together and his last days of pain and agony. However, rigid customs do not accommodate personal feelings.

Further, instead of keeping all the belonging of her husband, she goes ahead and through a noble act of charity donates his clothes at the old aged home.
Something that she really treasured was Minocher’s pugree (a head dress). This was normally worn at weddings and so it was almost out of fashion. She wanted Minocher to live eternally through his pugree. Luckily she saw a small advertisement in the ‘Jam-e-Jamshed’ and had a taker for it. Daulat faces a lot of opposition for this but is firm and adamant. She hands over the pugree to the Youngman and says:

But let me tell you, my Minocher would be happy to give it to you if he were here. He would rejoice to see someone get married in his pugree. So if you want it, take it today.

(Mistry 75)

She continues:

It is yours, wear it in good health. And take good care of it for my Minocher.

(Mistry 76)

This story throws light on the fact that customs and traditions are man-made and should be followed only for man’s convenience. Compromises can be made and should be made flexible. It is important to follow the age old rituals and rites in spirit and not literally. It requires a lot of mental courage to break the age-old practices and this is exactly what Daulat did.

III:vii:v The Collectors:

This story is an attempt at initiating young people into the pleasures of philately (stamp collection).
The central character is Dr. Burjor Mody, a new tenant at the Firozsha Baag. He has come to Bombay by the status of the Principal of the Bombay Veterinary College. He soon becomes the life of the residential complex.

However, the black sheep of the family was his only son Pesi, whose irresponsible behaviour caused Dr. Mody enough trouble. Dr. Mody got acquainted with Jehangir and began showing him his album of stamp collection. This was how he sowed the seeds of interest within Jehangir. The wide range and variety of stamps created great fascination and young Jehangir was soon engrossed with this new hobby. However, it was an expensive hobby. To satisfy the urge of his new found hobby, we find Jehangir doing many things.

He was implicated in the act of stealing of stamps from the roadside vendors. He also got into a homosexual experience with his classmate Eric. All that he had to do was to satisfy the erotic impulses of Eric and in return he was rewarded with stamps.

Jehangir showed his collection to Dr. Mody, who appreciated him and in return showed him special treasure of stamps. The Spanish stamp goes missing and Dr. Mody suspects Jehangir, who can do very little to defend himself.

The story ends with the sudden demise of Dr. Mody. Jehangir is then invited by Mrs. Mody exactly after a year. Mrs. Mody who always disliked Jehangir now sighs:

_I asked you to come today because there is something I want to give you. Something of Burjor Uncle’s. I thought about it for many days. Pesi is not interested, and I don’t know anything_
about it. Will you take his collection?

(Mistry 100)

She also confessed to having misplaced the Spanish stamp and having conveniently blamed Jehangir for it.

Jehangir was speechless but the wide range of stamps failed to move him. He had stopped stamp collection long time back.

Jehangir explored the room where he had spent many a happy moments with Dr. Mody:

……and he could almost hear Dr. Mody again, the soft inspired tones speaking of promises and dreams, quite different from his usual booming, jovial voice, and that faraway look in his eyes which had once glinted with rage when Pesi had tried to bully him.

(Mistry 101)

Jehanjir left home with the vast treasure of stamps. He tried to rekindle his interest in philately……… but nothing happened. The stamps remained in the trunk and they were slowly destroyed by cockroaches and other insects. Jehangir could not keep the memories of Dr. Mody alive. Everything was left to tatter and rust in the trunk.

There is a sigh of depression, when Mistry mentions about the Bombay police and Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s Garibi Hatao campaign.

*The Bombay police, in a interpretation of the nation’s mandate: garibi hatao—eradicate poverty, conducted periodic round-ups of pavement dwellers, sweeping into their vans beggers and street-vendors, cripples and*
alcoholics, the homeless and the hungry, and dumped them somewhere outside the citylimits; when the human deritus made its way back into the city, another clean-up was scheduled.

(Mistry 98)

There is a lot of human feelings and sentiments in the history. Dr. Mody’s obsession with his hobby and his desire to spend the rest of his retired life in the company of his stamps was not understood or appreciated by Mrs. Mody. It was only after his death that she really repented for all her misdoings.

There is also another underlying issue and that is a hobby cannot be forced upon anyone. It happens out of choice; from within. This exactly happens at the end of the story. Jehangir has no remorse or regret to see Dr. Mody’s stamp collection falling to pieces.

III:vii:vi Of White Hairs and Cricket:

There are number of issues occurring in this story. The story opens with young Kersi pulling out all the grey hair from his father’s head.

Kersi narrates:

Daddy relied on my nimble fourteen-year-old fingers to uproot the signposts of mortality sprouting week after week. It was unappetizing work, combing through his hair greasy with day-old pomade, isolating the white ones, or the ones just beginning to turn—half black and half white, and somehow mote repulsive.

(Mistry 107-08)
This activity however creates a tension in the household. According to the Parsis, the hair is associated with the evil and so the hair-pulling activity was considered to give impetus to the evil one. This is one reason why orthodox Parsis cover their head.

The grand mother (Mamaji) hated this activity and spoke under her breath:

*Sunday dawns and he makes the child do that duleendar thing again. It will only bring bad luck.*

(Mistry 109)

This event throws light on the blind faith or the superstitious attitude of some Parsis even to the date.

In the same story, there is a reference to the cricket game. Cricket was a craze with Kersi’s father and all the boys in Firozsha Baag. He says:

*Daddy took anyone who wanted to play to the Marine Drive Maidan, and organized us into teams, captaining one team himself. We went early, before the sun got too hot and the maidan overcrowded.*

(Mistry 116-17)

Kersi enjoyed these cricket sessions and longed for them every Sundays.
Kersi’s grand mother was a superstitious woman. She was also very hardworking and devout, and spun wool for kusti’s and wove them herself. The rotating spindle fascinated the young boy and he looked at it spell bound. Grandma also exhibited her culinary skills and fed Kersi on the sly, as his parents objected to her feeding him with all her spicy stuff.

In addition to all this, there is an underlying current of gloom and unhappiness in the house. The father is unable to get a better paid job. Week after week he goes through a number of advertisements to seek for a better job.

Listing mother’s reaction to such advertisements, he says:

\begin{quote}
Mummy listened to such advertisements week after week: harbingers of hope that ended in disappointment and frustration. But she always allowed in the initial wave of optimism to lift her, riding it with daddy and me, higher and higher, making plans and dreaming, until it crashed and left us stranded, awaiting the next advertisement and the next wave.
\end{quote}

(Mistry 112)

Nothing really happened. Dreams about having a gas stove and fridge remained unfilled.

Kersi began underestimating his father and began resenting the hair pulling activity. A kind of guilt was created between both the father and the son; and this gulf kept widening with the attitude of Kersi.

Slowly the Sunday cricket matches on Chaupatty beach stopped and the game was confined to the four walls of Firozsha Baag. Kersi had been very close to his friend, Viraf and spent a lot of time with him. Soon
Viraf’s father took ill and Viraf was all the time attending to his father like a dutiful son.

This serves as an eye-opener to Kersi. He regrets being rude to his father and for having cared less for him. He hopes that his father will call him again to pluck the white hair, but he doesn’t. He wanted to talk to his father, laugh with him and recreate the past; but his ego and pride stand in the way. He throws himself on the bed and weeps. All the past come before him. He weeps for his old Mamaji, his overworked mother, his friend Viraf, his sick father and his own unsuccessful father. He regrets:

\[ I \text{ wanted to weep for myself, for not being able to}
\]
\[ \text{hug Daddy when I wanted to, and for not ever}
\]
\[ \text{saying thank you for cricket in the morning, and}
\]
\[ \text{pigeons and bicycles and dreams; and for all the}
\]
\[ \text{white hairs that I was powerless to stop.}
\]

(Mistry 120)

Mistry very successfully portrays the gulf between the father and son; and how the new generation stops not to think about their ageing parents and the many sacrifices done by them. The story ends on a note of guilt, regret and remorse.

\textbf{III:vii:vii The Paying Guests:}

This story indirectly hints at the process of immigration and the after effects of it. The younger generation chiefly migrates to the Western countries for better prospects. This makes them leave their old parents back home who suffer from loneliness and the aches of old age. This loneliness is not merely superficial but has a deeper meaning to it. On the
wider canvas, this loneliness and alienation is symbolic of what the Parsis suffer in India.

Such alienation and loneliness often leads to dysfunctional and aberrant behaviour both within the Indian as well as the Western contexts.
(Mistry 93)

This story has an elderly couple Ardesar and Khorsedbai, whose only son had migrated to Canada. On his invitation to Canada, they sell their house and go with great hopes of spending the rest of their lives in the company of their beloved son. However, they were in store for great sorrow and shock, for they were treated very shabbily. Having taken enough, they return back to Bombay, but find themselves homeless.

They become paying guests sharing the flat with Boman and Kashmira. The renting of the flat throws light on yet another aspect of the Bombay Rent Act. Once a flat/house rented cannot be got back without a good amount of pain and tension.

Korshedbai and Ardesar are requested to leave the flat, as the space is insufficient for the Boman’s who are expecting their second child. Both the couples are caught in a dilemma and a ‘no-win situation’.

Khorshedbai descends into insanity and then begins her bizarre behaviour. She begins scattering rubbish outside Kashmira’s door thereby bringing about bitterness in the otherwise cordial relationship. Korshedbai’s insanity culminates to the highest peak of madness when she abducts Kashmira’s new baby and shuts him in the empty cage, which belongs to her parrot, Pestonjee.

Mistry, as a writer, has done a fine job by sympathizing with both the women. Both the women are right from their point of view and each
one’s problems are genuine. Both are helpless, horrified and in great trauma. After a close reading, even the readers will find it difficult to side with any one of the two women.

None of the residents were willing to testify against the older couple in the court of law. They all had their own excuses and this worsened matters. However, after the final act of abducting the child, the paying guests leave.

_The paying guests went quietly: Khorschedbai first, by ambulance, everyone knew where; then Ardeshar, no one knew where, by taxi._

(Mistry 139)

**III:vii:viii Squatter:**

Mistory always expresses his concern over the various issues associated with the Parsi community. According to him, it is not only an ageing (community) race but a dying one too. Everyone dares to dream, but all dreams do not materialize. Dreams unfulfilled create a void within and pangs of pain too Sarosh, commonly known as Sid dreamt of making it big in Canada. He successfully migrates too and is on the look out for happiness unknown and unseen before. He undergoes a process of metamorphosis. However, this transformation has no effect on his stubborn bowels. He tries hard to mimic the western style and mannerisms but in vain. He is forced to squat on the toilet pot in Toronto, the Indian style.

The crisis of the identity construct comes to the fore. A person may adopt change outwardly, but the truth is that the inner self finds it difficult to keep pace with the change. The old self refuses to go away and further
stands as a barriers in the construction of the new self. The entire process is confusing and takes its toll on Sid. In the host country Sid

*Could detect something malodorous in the air; the presence of Xenophobia and hostility.*

(Mistry 156)

Sid is unable to subscribe to the code ascribed by the host country. However, Sid was a loser. He gave it a ten year try

*Obtaining his new citizenship had not helped either. He remained dependent on the old way, and this unalterable fact, strengthened afresh every morning of his life in the new country, suffocated him. “The ten-year time limit was more an accident than anything else. But it hung over him with the awesome presence and sharpness of a guillotine.*

(Mistry 154)

To get rid of his stubborn bowels, Sid also goes in for the CNI—a small device, Crappus Non Interruptus, which had to be implanted in the bowel. But soon realizes that not being the natural way, he would not be able to live life the normal way again.

Finally, after a lot of apprehension Sid returned to India. This caused him much embarrassment. Sid was looking out for the old places and the old pattern of life that he had left ten years ago; but he failed
again. He found himself lonely in the crowd too. This incident no doubt made him sober and serene.

He has a very soulful message for all those wanting to leave their mother land. He says:

‘Tell them,’ said Sarosh, ‘that the world can be a bewildering place, and dreams and ambitions are often paths to the most pernicious of traps.

“When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: tell them that in Toronto once there lived a Parsi boy as best as he could. Set you down this; and say, besides, that for some it was good and for some it was bad, but for me life in the land of milk and honey was just a pain in the posterior.”

(Mistry 168)

Mistry hits hard at the land flowing with milk and honey (Canada) and indirectly warns the people about the tensions one could face in the West. Very often we are forced to think that Mistry is voicing his experience, care and concern through the words of Sid. The parting words of Sid create a vaccum in the soul, which needs a serene mind to comprehend.

III:vii:ix  Lend me Your Light:

This short story begins with the lines of Rabindranath Tagore from Gitanjali:
…………… Your lights are all lit—then where
do you go with your lamp?

My house is all dark and lonesome, - lend me
Your light.

(Mistry 173)

Mistry attempts at presenting the periscopic vision in his
writings—the periscopic vision of both India and the West. The
contrasting and contradictory pictures are brought to the fore very
skillfully. The Indian vices such as unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and
the political drama is presented very realistically.

The story is about two brothers born and brought up in the same
family and the same atmosphere. However, there appeared no similarity
between them. A gulf is seen between them, which widens with time.
This is clearly brought out when the narrator says:

There you were, my brother, waging battles
against corruption and evil, while I was watching
sitcoms on my rented Granda TV. Or attending
dinner parties at Parsi homes to listen to chit-chat
about airlines and trinkets. And it was no use
wishing that we had talked more to each other
about our hopes, visions and dreams.

(Mistry 184)

He does not know when and where the gulf appeared and so could
also do very little to abridge the gap.

The Parsis have always enjoyed an elite status during the colonial
period. However; after the departure of the British, things were not the
same. Although they were placed in prominent positions, in every walk of life, the truth is that they were lost their elite status and were also not able to assimilate with the main stream Indians. The fact that they marginalized made them want to leave the country. All that they found in India was nepotism, corruption and political interference. The grinding poverty, which entangled India was something that they hated. This intensified their urge to leave the country and go in the search of better prospects. Some of them don’t even consider India to be a place that can offer a decent living.

Jamshed states:

“Absolutely no future in this stupid place,” he said. “Bloody corruption everywhere. And you can’t buy any of the things you want, don’t even get to see a decent English movie. First chance I get, I’m going abroad. Preferably the U. S.”

(Mistry 178)

However, Mistry is critical about the immigrants and their attitude towards migration. Ironically Mistry compares the immigrants to Tiresias, a Greek prophet who was blind. This is artistically put forth through the words of the narrator. The night before his flight to Toronto, he has a severe eye pain. He considers this as a punishment for:

The sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto...
In a way there is truth in what Mistry says. The immigrant is like a blind man who is unable to look into the past. What concerns him is only the present for which he is ready to do anything.

However, once out of the homeland, the immigrant is tortured by pangs of guilt. Somehow he feels that he has been unjust to the mother land. Back in the West, he spends all his waking thoughts in romanticizing and idealizing her. After having spent a number of years in the West, he feels that the picture must have definitely been a place worthy to live. However, on one of the trips back home the real picture stands in juxtaposition to all that was imagined so far. This dawning of the reality sets about a mental conflict and also the whole psyche in a confused state. This leads to heart breaking moments, shattering of dreams, misery and the immigrant who was already physically away from the home land now also move away spiritually from it.

**III:vii:x Exercisers:**

This short story throws light on the aspect of ethnicity and the limits to which the Parsis would carry it. Marrying out of the community is a big no for the Parsis and anyone who does this is ostracized from the Parsi fold.

Mr. and Mrs. Bulsara are totally against their son, Jehangir’s affair with a girl although she is a Parsi. No amount of persuasion will make either party see reason; and finally the parents decide to take the son to a ‘holy man’, Bhagwan Baba.

This incidence also throws light on another aspect and that being superstition and blind faith. Probably the acquaintance with the Indians India’s could have led to the belief in the Godman and other superstitious
aspects. Illusion, imagination, traditions and customs have all been presented skillfully. These are the factors, which stand as a hurdle from witnessing reality.

The parents feel that their son is still too young to go out with a girl and seek the advice of the Baba. Whatever the Baba meant, his words have a universal appeal. He says:

\[\text{Life is a trap, full of webs. Ask yourself, what does the sensible person do if a trap is facing him? Avoid, get away from it.}\]

(Mistry 213)

It meant that sometimes things go beyond our capacity and there is very little we can do. However, unnecessary events and persons can be avoided by keeping away from it.

The story also deals with the stern action taken by parents towards their children all in the process of disciplining them. It is also necessary for the parents to strike the right cord. Extreme disciplinary actions may mar relationship. Jehangir is torn between his love for his girl and loyalty to his parents. When he wants to go home early, his girl shouts:

\[\text{“Calm down, will you? Your mother’s world won’t end if you are late. Haven’t you learned yet? All these are just her tactics to--”}\]

(Mistry 224)

And when he comes home late his mother has the last word. She utters:
“This time you crossed the limit. Your father says be patient, he is just a boy. Just a boy, yes, but the boy has climbed to the roof.”

(Mistry 224)

Jehangir is scarified at the altar of love and loyalty and he finds it difficult to choose the mid-way.

III:vii:xi  Swimming Lessons:

The last story in this series is ‘the Swimming Lessons’. This story presents the swimming pursuits of Kersi. He tries to identify and relocate himself in the Western scenario. The trauma that he faces is worth pondering. No matter however hard he tries, Kersi is not able to master the skills of swimming. Reminiscing his swimming attempts at Bombay, he says:

\[
\text{It was hopeless. My first swimming lesson. The water terrified me. When did that happen, I wonder, I used to love splashing at Chaupatty, carried about by the waves. And this was only a swimming pool. Where did all that terror come from? I’m trying to remember.}
\]

(Mistry 238)

This same inability he carries on even in his swimming attempts in Canada.

The elements of nostalgia and memory seek an outlet through this story.
Kersi reminisces about Bombay, the chaupati beach, the trips to the beach with his mother, the coconut day, Ganesh Chaturti. His trips to the sea were in connection with the Parsi religious ceremonies. He fondly remembers the various articles entrusted to the care of the Sea God, Avan Yezad. This brings him memories of home and his people back home.

Kersi is also disillusioned and disappointed at several times. A simple disillusionment that he encounters is when he sees two sun bathing glamorous women from a distance. The women applying lotion on each other excite him and he prefers to take a closer look at them. However, what he encounters at close quarters is not a couple of ‘glamourous’ women,

*But wrinkled skin, aging hands, sagging bottoms, varicose veins.*

(Mistry 233)

Further, very often he encounters people and events, which disillusion him no end. The moral that appearances are deceptive, proves to be right. This disillusionment is faced by almost all the people who migrate to the ‘land flowing with milk and honey’. They realize that things are not as expected and the lure that literally pulls them to the West is nothing but an illusion.

At the beginning of the story we find Kersi and his inability at mastering the skills of swimming both in Bombay and in Canada too. This symbolically suggests the inability of Kersi to assimilate with either the home land or the host land. However, we find a ray of hope and regeneration at the end of the story. In the bath-tub we find Kersi opening his eyes. This again is symbolic of his attempt at seeing life in a double perspective –homeland and the host land, Indian and the Western.
Assimilating with both the countries is not an easy task. Just like swimming it needs a lot of efforts. The world within the water and the world without throw light on the insider insider-outsider status of Kersi and of all immigrants alike. Both the worlds (countries) are presented, which is very contrasting in nature, Kersi, who stands as a representative of all immigrants belongs to both the countries partly. Assimilation through difficulty can be made possible through the efforts. Reality should be placed right in front of us while dealing with such things and should not be mixed with illusion. Fact is different from fiction, reality from imagination and cause from effects. This is beautifully concluded through the words of Kersi’s father.

Don’t you see, said Father, that you are confusing fiction with facts, fiction does not create facts, fiction can come from facts, it can grow out of facts by compounding, transposing, augmenting, diminishing, or altering them in any way; but you must not confuse what really happened with what the story says happened, you must not lose your grasp on reality, that way madness lies.

(Mistry 250)

Mistry does not live in India and for all purposes he is happily settled in Canada. However, he longs for his homeland and continues to have an emotional liaison with her through his literature. Sometimes Mistry has been criticized from various quarters for not being out rightly authentic in his writings. The critical charge against him puts his
relationship with India under a lot of microscopic analysis. Time and again he has been questioned regarding his relationship with India. No doubt he must have also faced a lot of hindrances during the writing process. Talking to a British magazine, he says:

So far I have had no difficulty writing about it, even though I have been always for so long ……………..All fiction relies on the real world, in the sense, that we all take in the world through our five sense and we accumulate details consciously or sub-consciously. This accumulation of detail can be drawn on when you write fiction.

(www.Barnesandnoble.com)

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III:viii A FINE BALANCE:

A Fine Balance is a very mature kind of composition when compared to the earlier series of short story collection. The deplorable conditions of the post independent India is focused upon. We find Mistry a little pessimistic in his approach and he delves deep into both the urban psyche and the rural degeneration of the Indians. Along with the political and social crisis of the country, Mistry also handles the evils such as caste system and the oppression of the down trodden people at the hands of the rich landlords. The political and social atrocities committed are also truthfully presented and it creates horror and terror in the minds of the readers. Much that was unheard and unseen is brought to the fore.
What does Mistry’s fiction deal with? This is stated aptly by Pramod Nayar, who in the foreword to his book, *The Novels of Rohinton Misty—A Critical Study* by Jaydipsinh Dodiya states:

*Mistry’s fiction is concerned with the great inequalities of the world; between the classes, genders, castes and official hierarchies.*

(Dodiya ix)

*A Fine Balance* is a moving narrative painted on a wide canvas. There are a number of characters from all walks of life—Dina Dalal, Ishwar and Omprakash Darji, Maneck Kohla and a number of insignificant characters who add significance to the meaning of life.

The novel is all about the importance of maintaining a fine balance in our lives by striking the right cord. There is a constant need to keep working at the wheels of life. Every character here faces a number of obstacles in the course of life. Life for them is never smooth sailing. Some hurdles are nature sent whereas the others are man-made. All of them struggle very hard. Some of them successfully maintain a fine balance; and the others not being able to do so bow down to the forces of fate.

Fate comes in different guises before which man is helpless. The novels myriad characters are grouped as the oppressed and the oppressor. The oppressed suffer in silence and those who dare to counter act are reduced to the state of a mere nothingness.

**III:viii:i  Quest for Identity:**

The protagonist of the novel is Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow. Her early childhood with her parents was very comfortable. However, various
forces work against. Like her father she wanted to become a doctor. The towering personality of her father greatly influenced her. Things worked well for her until his sudden death. However, the tables were now turned over. She had to seek solace under the stern guardianship of her brother. He stopped her education and she was forced to do all the household work. She accepts her fate but revolts too.

*I’m not your servant! Wash your own dirty plates! You said we would each do our own work! All your stinking things you leave for me!…….. He’s cheating! He doesn’t do any work! I do everything!*

(Mistry 19)

When she could no longer take all the harassment, she begins to seek an outlet. The urge to seek her real identity is very intense. She begins going out to music concerts and libraries to keep herself intellectually updated.

It is here that she meets Rustom Dalal, a very ordinary person who shares her passion for books and music. They fall in love and decide to marry. She finds the greatest hurdle in the form of her brother. But wanting to live life on her own terms, she rebels against him and marries Rustom. They are very happy, but for a short time. The untimely death of Rustom shatters her. Having no other way to fend for herself she sets up her own fashion business. She takes orders from the Au Revoir Fashion House and begins to come to terms with life.

As she cannot cater to the growing demands of the fashion House, she begins to look out for tailors who can help her in her task.
The two tailors come to her in the form of Ishwar and Omprakash Darji. They are chamars (leather makers) by caste. They come from a village and are here in the ‘dream city’ to make a name for them.

The life of the oppressed class in the village was very deplorable. They suffered endlessly from their childhood for belonging to a particular caste. When they can take the oppression no longer, they decide to go against and break all man-made rules. They give up their caste and take up to the profession of tailors. They migrate to the city of dreams and dream about making it big here.

However, for having defied the rules of the society and the community they are punished. Even their families do not escape the wrath of the villagers. At the end of the novel we find them begging on the road of the city. The dream city shatters their dreams and reduces them to the status of handicapped beggars.

Many questions come to the mind of the readers. Why do the Darjis suffer so much? What was their crime? Is conversion by choice considered to be so gross? The readers are left with no answer to all these questions.

The next character is Maneck Kohah who lives in ‘the land of the mountains’. He comes to the city for his further education and plans to go to the Gulf after that. As his mother happens to be a friend of Dina Dalal, he comes to her house to live as a paying guest. It is here that the Darjis too begins working for Dina. Thus four different people come together and create a world for themselves away from the maddening crowd. They all begin to depend on one another and find solace in each others company.

III:viii:ii  The real India:
The real India is seen in its various shades and moods in the novel. Diasporic or migrant writers are often criticized for presenting incomplete truths. Mistry is often criticized with an outsider’s perspective about the agony and hazards of India’s population during the days of internal emergency. He is criticized that living in Canada and writing about India, he has lost with the warmth of human relationships in the third world. However, the fact is about Mistry’s novel creates so much horror, something which is not merely skin deep, but proof enough to show the valid authenticity of the facts presented.

Vinita Bhatnagar justifies and supports Mistry and the critical comments regarding his impartial truths.

In her article “A Reading of A Fine Balance”, she very aptly states:

*If Mistry’s ‘truth’ is incomplete it is because it is in the nature of fiction to be incomplete and self-contradictory. A text presents reality partially or incoherently, leaving gaps. Through these gaps a reader can see what the text was hiding from itself.*

(Bhatnagar 23)

Mistry is not merely content portraying the Parsi world and the endangered community. He goes ahead and explores unexplored arenas. The oppression of the downtrodden, the punishment mated out for defying man-made rules, the social attributes the political drama are few of the various issues handled by Mistry. No doubt all this is based on second hand or borrowed information; but he adds a touch of authenticity to all that he writes.
The Emergency period during the rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the atrocities committed during this period (1975-1977), and the trauma caused to the majority poor is presented with such stark reality that it sends shivers down our spine.

Mistry is very bitter about the vasectomy drive, a family planning campaign undertaken by Sanjay Gandhi and his men. They saw this as a solution towards population control. The poor men were lured to undergo sterilization by giving incentives like a transistor, a ration card or money. The grinding poverty forced many men to undergo the same a double time. People were literally forced to undergo this operation. We find an old woman wailing and telling the doctor:

\[ \text{I am old, my womb is barren, there are no more eggs in it. Why are you wasting operation on me?} \]

(Mistry 532)

Her words go unheeded and she is forcibly performed upon.

Although many years have gone by, the bitterness still remains. This political stunt caused a lot of misery and pain.

Another political event that caused misery, disillusionment, dislocation and inexplicable wrath was the historical partition. A line was drawn across India and the new land was called Pakistan. There was lot of movement to the other side of the line. The birth of the new country was not a matter of joy but caused a lot of bloodshed and mourning.

Mistry is bitter when he says:

\[ \text{But long before that eagerly waited birth, there was another, gorier parturition, when two nations incarnated out of one. A foreigner drew a magic} \]
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.

(Mistry 205)

These political gimmicks were performed to please a few people, but ultimately what happened was the common men suffered, the memories of which are fresh even to this day.

Sunita Goel in an article “A Literary Voyage to India: Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance” aptly states:

Mistry achieves the remarkable feat of mixing historical slices with their personal lives and attempts to portray the reality of India.

(Goel 159)

III:viii:iii  Casteism and its Evils:

Casteism has always remained a social reality of India. The evils of casteism since the pre-independence days are known to us. Mistry goes ahead and fearlessly portrays the evils of casteism and how it goes ahead and changes the lives of the characters. Ishwar and his brother Narayan belong to the chamar community. They are not supposed to enjoy all the privileges that people from the higher community do. They are even deprived of formal education. As little boys and out of curiosity they enter the village school and look at the things kept in the ‘temple of learning’. However, this innocent act of theirs causes them a great deal.

The teacher who notices them is horrified and exclaims:
You chamar rascals! Very brave you are daring to enter the school! Is this what your parents teach you? To defile the tools of learning and knowledge?

(Mistry 110-11)

The boys are then caned mercilessly and for the rest of their lives they never dare to enter the school again.

The social atrocities and the evils of casteism continue through their adult years too. The panchayat or the social order of the village is set up by none other than the upper caste people, and so the downtrodden have no say in this matter.

Narayan, the brother of Ishawar, was not a person to accept and give in to oppression. Time and again he tried to revolt against the existing order of the village. He wanted to cast his vote at the assembly elections but saw the entire system filled with corruption. He objected to the system and openly revolted against the Thakur’s men. For having done so, he and his family are punished very brutally.

Throughout the day, at intervals, they were flogged as they hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree. Drifting in and out of consciousness, their screams grew faint ........

In the distance, in the far field, his men urinated on the three inverted faces. Semiconscious, the parched mouths were grateful for the moisture, licking the trickle with feeble urgency..... In the evening, after the ballot boxes were taken away
burning coals were held to the three men’s genitals, then stuffed into their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village until their tips and tongues melted away.

(Mistry 146)

Even the Darjis do not go unpunished. For having changed their caste and revolting against the socio/religious order, they are unpunished.

When the Darjis visit their village, they are forcibly operated upon by the Thakur’s men under the family planning campaign. The operation creates gangrene upon Iswar and his legs have to be amputated, rendering him handicapped for the rest of his life. Worse still is it for Om when his testicles are removed reducing him to the status of a eunuch. At the end of the novel both are seen begging on the street to keep their lives going.

The Darjis pay a heavy price for living life on their terms. Same is the plight of all the oppressed section of people. The pain, agony, misery, trouble, torture and degeneration is presented through the characters of the Darjis. While presenting their plight, Mistry creates spine chilling horror within the readers.

III:viii:iv  Sharing Compatibility:

Co-operating with one another and sharing a good level of compatibility is very essential in everyone’s life. Mistry strongly believes in this. Men cannot live alone and very often have to seeking refuge or sharing of compatibility goes beyond class, caste, religion and various other men set boundaries. The Darjis, Maneck and Dina come together for their personal and professional purposes and create a little world, away from the glaring crowd.
Mistry entitles one of his chapters as ‘Sailing under One Flag’. It is here that all the four characters come together.

Dina Dalal belongs to the ‘city by the sea’, Maneck to the ‘mountains’ and the Darjis to the ‘village by the river’.

All these people come under one flag giving no scope for reluctance, pretensions and apprehensions of any kind. They find solace in each other’s company and it’s only when they are together that they share some joyous moments. Once again their lives are filled with laughter and the calm. They begin to share a wonderful rapport, which crosses all limitations.

**III:viii:v  Reality versus Imagination:**

Every person lives in the real world and occasionally moves to the world of imagination. This movement gives him a temporary relief from the harsh realities of life. However, when imagination stands in sharp contrast to reality, dreams are shattered and many a hearts are broken.

Dina dreams of a happy, fairy tale life for herself and Rustom. His death shatters her. The Darjis dreams of making it big and being successful. Maneck, after his education moves to the Gulf for a better future. Even when away from home and friends he relived every moment spent with Dina and the Darjis and seeks solace and happiness. He was unaware of the entire untoward incident that happened back home and longs to relives life again. His father’s death brings him home and before going back to the Gulf decides to visit Dina, the Darjis, the restaurant where he always spent time and do all that he had done earlier.

However, this visit happened to be the turning point in his life. He found his mother a lonely widow. He expected to see the same charming Dina but is shocked to see her old and haggard. The charm was lost with the years. On enquiring about the Darjis, he comes to know about their
sorry plight. From newspaper clippings, he realizes that his college friend, Avinash had not committed suicide but was brutally murdered. On his way back he sees the Darjis begging and recognizes them instantly. One reduced to the state of a eunuch and the other a disabled beggar. He pretends not to recognize them and moves away. The beggars fail to understand whether he really avoided them or failed to recognize them. Maneck could not take anymore. He is heart broken. He is disillusioned and fails to understand why fate had reduced every one to the state of a mere nothingness. His mental setup does not allow him to comprehend the nature of life and fate. Totally exhausted of all mental energies he does not realize what to do next. He looks at the rails at the railway station.

A distant rumbling was heard and Maneck moved to the front of the platform. He stared at the rails. How they glinted, like the promise of life itself, stretching endlessly in both directions, silver ribbons skimming over the gravel bed, knitting together the blackened, worn-out wood of the railway ties…… when the first compartment had entered the station, he stepped off the platform and onto the gleaming silver tracks.

(Mistry 611-12)

He ends his life. He does not want fate to have the last word and instead decides to be his own destiny maker.

Actually the truth is that he failed to maintain a fine balance in his life. Dina and the Darjis face the ups and down in life. They take it all in their stride and keep working at the wheels of life.
Every person has to face a number of upheavals in life, in different forms. It is necessary that an apt balance be maintained to get going. This same balance has to be also extended to the society in which we live, so that we create a peaceful society.

This is very aptly stated by Nilufer Bharucha in her article, “Articulating Silences: Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*”. She opines:

*There is also the motif of ‘balance’ - a fine balance. It is this fine balance which…….helps them to lead a relatively peaceful, happy life, if they fail, it tips them over into the abyss.*

(Bharucha 30)

**III:viii:vi Quilt of Memory:**

The device of memory is the thread of life and weaves them into a beautiful quilt. There is a quilt, which Dina keeps sewing at. This quilt is highly symbolic as it re-calls an event/incident in life. All the different coloured pieces sewn together go on to make a beautiful multicoloured quilt. Each little piece contributes towards the making of the whole. Similarly each little piece denotes the little joys or sorrows of life, which are significant but when put together go on to give life a better dimension and make it wonderfully meaningful.

Dina uses the quilt at night to keep herself warm, and each little patch recount to her happy childhood, her miserable adolescence, her tragic marriage, her shattered dreams and many more things. She recalls the events in ‘the tightly knit family of patches’. She tired her best to build her family like her quilt, with the threads of love and affection; but fatefully she is left with no family that she can claim to be her own.

The tailor aptly states:
It will look beautiful, just keep connecting patiently, Dina bai that’s the secret. Jihan, it all seems meaningless bits and rags, till you piece it together.

(Mistry 403)

Even when Dina returns to her brother’s house, she fondly carries the quilt and keeps herself warm with it. The quilt helps her to get nostalgic and she reminisces the happy time she spent with Maneck and the Darji.

Like the multicoloured quilt, which comes in rags and patches, many a times Mistry’s stories also come in bits and pieces. They are gathered from various sources, but like the beautiful quilt, when put together go on to form a lively story, very close to being authentic.

Talking to Gokhale in an interview, Mistry agrees and states:

My novels are not ‘researched’ in the formal sense of the word. Newspaper, magazines, chats with visitors from India - these are things I rely on. Having said that, I will add that all these would be worthless without the two main ingredients: Memory and Imagination.

(The Times of India. Oct 27th 1996)

However, Mistry has never felt that the distance between him and his motherland has affected his relationship with her for the negative. He has never been spiritually away from her. He feels that after spending 23
years of one’s life in one place, the place is embedded within you; it’s almost as though one has not left the place.

III:ix Conclusion:

Mistry, a Parsi immigrant writer has gone through a number of experiences both at home and in the host country. Being marginalized both in the Indian society and in Canada too, he writes about his double displacement and the varied experiences that go with it. We find a number of elements prevalent in Mistry’s works and coming to fore too. Some of them are:

• The History of the Parsi migration to India.
• The resilience of his community for having stood the test of time.
• The elitist status and attitude of the Parsis.
• The decolonized India and the malaise that come with it.
• The Parsi world with the Zoroastrian faith.

Mistry, on his literal and literary journey treasures a lot of memories—some sweet and some bitter too. He has also, like his characters, gone through moments of dejection, depression, disillusionment, disappointment and degeneration. His deep concern reminds us of his character, Gustad Nobel, the protagonist of his first novel, Such a Long Journey. In his moment of gloom and dejection he says:

And now I wish I was back at the beginning,
without knowledge of the end. At the beginning,
at least there was hope. Now there is nothing.
Nothing but sorrow.

(Mistry 55)
However, Mistry is not a pessimist. He believes in regeneration and reconciliation. Towards the end of his writing we find the mature side of Mistry, the novelist.

Lines by Ameena Kazi Ansari from her article “Text/Subtext: Reading of *A Fine Balance*” are worth to quote. She states:

> Ironic vision, brooding in tone, amorphous in realities, *A Fine Balance* needs to be read as an expression of the predicament of self in the Indian urban/rural context. In spite of the stark life that it represents the novel reveals underlying moral purpose and appositive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns.

(Ansari 187)

Mistry is a humanitarian and the sympathetic angle with which he views the people …… with all their virtues and vices, stands him apart as a writer of modern times par excellence.
III:x References:


• The Times of India. Oct 27th 1996.

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