Chapter IV

Survival

When your love is a sour taste
In the mouth, become a matter
For apologies, survive.

...

When your face goes flat in
The silvered mirror, endure;
Endure, if you can, and survive.

John Newlove, “If You Can”

To find words for what we suffer,
To enjoy what we must suffer-
Not to be dumb beasts.

... ...

... We shall survive
And we shall walk
Somehow into summer.

-D.G. Jones, “Beating the Bushes: Christmas 1963”

(qtd. in Atwood 28)
The Struggle to Survive:

As Atwood states death is more real to a Canadian than a knight in armour. Charles G. D. Robert’s *Kings in Exile* and Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Wild Animals I have Known* were closer to real life. The materials for Seaton’s stick- and- stove artefacts and live- off- the- land receipes in *Wildhood Wisdom* were readily available, and could be made quite easily. However it was not just the content of these books but their shapes and patterns which feel more real. “The animal stories were about the struggle to survive” (30)

In the world of fantasy as captured in the comic books and fairy tales good triumphs evil, the major characters always got rescued or returned from the world of dangers to a secure one. On the other hand in Seton and Roberts, because the world of dangers was the same as the real world, you did not. As Atwood states, in explicit Canadian Literature books, like the Robert Weaver and Helen James anthology, *Canadian Short Stories*, those animals were on the run, most of them in human clothing this time and those humans up against it (30). There was the sense of familiar peril lurking behind every bush by the very environment you are surrounded.

Hope – The American Symbol:

As Atwood states, every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core which holds the country together and makes the people work towards a common goal. Possibly the symbol for America is The Frontier: it suggests a place that is new and ever expanding; it holds out a hope, never fulfilled but always promised, of Utopia, the perfect human society (31-32). Most twentieth century American Literature
is about the gap between the promise and the actuality. “The imagined ideal Golden West or City Upon a Hill, the model for all the world postulated by the Puritans, and the actual squalid materialism, dothy small town, nasty city, or redneck- filled outback” (Atwood 32).

The Island – Symbol of England:

The corresponding symbol for England is perhaps ‘The Island’. The island- as-body, self contained, evolving organically with a hierarchical structure. “The Englishman’s home as his castle is a popular form of this symbol, the feudal castle being not only an insular structure but a self-contained microcosm of the entire Body Politic” (Atwood 32).

Survival – The Symbol of Canada:

The central symbol for Canada is undoubtedly ‘survival’. Like the ‘Frontier’ and the ‘Island’, it is a multi-faceted and adaptable idea. For early explorers it meant bare survival in the face of hostile elements. But the word can also suggest survival of a crisis or disaster, what might be called ‘grim’ survival. There is also the cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. But the main idea in Canadian Literature is bare survival: hanging on for dear life. The central idea in Canadian Literature is not one which generates excitement and sense of adventure or danger which The Frontier holds, nor is it the sense of security, of order, which the Island can offer, but an almost intolerable anxiety. “the survivor has no
triumph or victory but the fact of his survival, he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except gratitude for having escaped with his life” (Atwood 33).

**A Fine Balance – The story of a Heroic Struggle:**

Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* is the story of the heroic struggle of two tailors whose attempt of survival becomes the microcosm for all the poor in India. “It is through the eyes of the affable Ishvar and cynical Omprakash (Om) that we become encompassed in their tale, one painted in shades of green, brown and ultimately black” (Goldblatt 94)

The story winds and unwinds to reveal the tailors’ past, present and futures. “When the tailors are first introduced to the readers they appear to be excited and nervous, hoping to secure jobs. Mistry soon fills us with the tailor’s background and the vicious caste hierarchical system of their village which they are fleeing from” (Goldblatt 94).

**The Canadian gloom in *A Fine Balance* and *The English Patient*:**

Most Canadian writing is pessimistic or ironic. To this Atwood states, that it is probably due to the fact that the Canadian writers were following the 20th century trend, as most of the Canadian Literature has been written in that century. Secondly, though a short lyric poem of joy and glee is possible, a novel of any length can not exclude these elements. A novel with uninterrupted happiness has to be very short or boring. Though both of these arguments are valid, the Canadian gloom has engulfed the scenario and the death and failure rate is out of proportion. In *A Fine Balance* there is Maneck, Shankar, Dukhi, Narayan and his family and other minor characters who die in a tragic manner. In *The English Patient* there is Katherine, Clinton, Madox, the English Patient and other
Rohinton Mistry, makes an important contribution to the fiction of the 21st century. Indeed, *A Fine Balance*, is a kind of masterpiece despite being overburdened with misery. “It is a huge and ambitious work which ignores the Western spiritual invasion of the 1970s and focuses on an unlikely quartet of natives struggling to survive, in a major but unidentified city, the poverty, squalor, and political and caste violence of Indira Gandhi’s India” (Davenport 444). The novel centres around the young Dina Dalal, whose independence from her stringent brother depends on her success of her business deal with the export firm. She takes in the movingly optimistic Ishvar and the angry young nephew Omprakash who have also broken the clasp of caste on their lives and have fled into the city in search of a new beginning. There is also the paying guest Maneck Kohlah the fourth inmate who is the son of Dina’s schoolmate. The four eventually form a kind of makeshift family of mutual affection and inter-dependence.

There can hardly be a genuine account for depicting the staggering power of evil in the novel. Grinding poverty, murders, mutilations and suicides destroy hordes of major and minor characters with a relentless thoroughness of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy. The poverty and overcrowding of India would make misery likely in any case, but the real culprit in the author’s view are Western material “progress”, caste intolerance, and above all, the abstraction-based political oppression of Mrs. Gandhi’s declared state of internal emergency, with its propaganda,
election fraud, staged political rallies, brutal round ups of the poor for “workcamps”, evictions, sterilizations and utter disregard for the human life. It all comprises of a massive and brilliantly woven tapestry of despair. (Davenport 444)

The Basic Victim Positions:

Atwood divides basic victim position into four categories into which all the characters portrayed in Canadian Literature would fall. Most of the characters would appear in more than one victim position, as there would be a transition from one to another.

Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim. (Atwood 36)

Denying the obvious, exerts a lot of pressure, as one has to suppress anger and pretend that certain visible facts do not exist. This position is usually taken by those in a victim group who are slightly better off than the others in that group. They are afraid to recognize themselves as victims for fear of losing the privileges they possess. Thereby they are forced to account for the disadvantages suffered by the rest of the people. “The Basic game in Position One is “Deny your Victim-experience” (Atwood 36).

In A Fine Balance there are Nusswan and Mrs. Gupta, both of whom are happy during the time of Emergency, really do not care how their workers suffer. In this concern we have the foreman abusing Ishvar and Om saying, “All you lazy rascals think you should not be here. The government will no longer tolerate it. You will work. In return you will get food and a place to sleep” (Mistry 344). Nusswan is all praises for the
Prime Minister as he says, “thanks to our visionary leader and the Beautification Programme, it will be restored to its former glory” (371). His view on the family planning is “Hardworking, educated people like Maneck is what we need. Not lazy, ignorant millions. And we also need strict family planning” (372). When the riots started in the city, in the wake of Partition and the British departure, Nusswan lamented the countries calamity, grumbling endlessly, saying,

    Every day I sit at home, I lose money. These bloody uncultured savages don’t deserve independence. If they must hack one another to death, I wish they would go somewhere else and do it quietly. In their village, maybe. Without disturbing our lovely city by the sea (Mistry 25).

During the time of Emergency, city beautification was enforced by destroying the jhopadpattis and thereby making people homeless. The poor were thrown out from their jhopadpattis onto the streets and from the streets to work shelters, wherein they forced labour in exchange for meager shelter and food. For example, Ishvar and Om were taken by force by Sergeant Kesar, mistaking them for beggars. The city beautification had a new target in mind. This was a progressive new strategy for the beggary problem; he had to dump pavement dwellers in waste land outside the city. Thereby he was getting commission from the facilitator who in turn handed them to the contractor. This was nothing more than a slave trade. The irony of the situation was that this money goes for paying his daughter’s Sitar lessons. The factual binaries of reality questions whether ‘progress’ is for better or worse. One has to be a slave for another to prosper. The jhopadpattis had to be destroyed in order to beautify the city. One has to be
homeless for the other to live in a clean and neat city, meaning a city inclusive of only modern houses.

The payment dwellers were being made to work like slaves for the expanding irrigation project. There was a group of people like Seargeant Kesar, facilitator, foreman, project manager who get commissions according to the position they hold as it is said, “the wheels have to be kept oiled”(Mistry 357). These people are all wreaking the benefit from the sweat of the pavement dwellers. As what the free labours lacked in efficiency it made up in numbers. The pavement dwellers became a direct threat to the paid workers. Thereby harassment of the newcomers was constant.

Nusswan’s skepticism is seen when he thinks about Dina after she had returned back to him, defeated in her struggle for independence. He thinks sitting alone in his room,

. . . what life did to those who refused to learn its lessons: it beat them down and broke their spirit. But atleast her days of endless toil were behind her. Now she would be cared for, provided for by her own family (Mistry 574).

The game of cards is used as a symbol to compare with Dina’s choices of trying to be independent on her own and Nusswan’s sceptical thinking. “‘You should never have thrown away the knave of hearts’, he told Dina. ‘That’s why you lost.’ ‘I took a chance’” (Mistry 575). What he does not understand is she had something to live for earlier now she just exists. His absurd suggestion to control population also reveals his sceptical and sadistic nature.
Death would be a mercy for the poor is the opinion of businessmen like Nusswan. Due to the increasing population growth the family planning scheme was introduced. The facts brought out like forcing family planning scheme on the poor was inhuman. As one of those men who has already done family planning out of his own will for the first time and now being dragged for the second time in the camp tells Ishvar the hopelessness of family planning, “... when the educated people are behaving like savages. How do we talk to them? When the ones in power have lost their reason, there is no hope” (Mistry 535).

Like Nusswan many rich people consider the scheme to be a boon as he says, “... two hundred million people are surplus to requirements and they should be eliminated” (Mistry 372). His view of eliminating the poor was rather easy though inhuman, he says, “That’s easy. One way would be to feed them a free meal containing arsenic or cyanide, whichever is cost-effective. Lorries could go around to the temples and places where they gather to beg” (Mistry 373). When Dina questions the moral thinking of businessmen, he says most of them do but until the Emergency they were not able to freely speak their minds. Due to the emergency the employers were happy but the employees were to have the brunt of it.

The Second Victim Position: Victimization is an Act of Fate:

The second basic victim position as describes by Atwood is, “to acknowledge the fact you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of fate, the will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea” (Atwood 37).
However as one’s victim position is destined by a larger force over which one has no control, one is neither blamed for it nor is expected to do anything about it. This attitude displaces the cause from the real source of oppression to something else. As Atwood states,

Because the fake cause is so vast, nebulous and unchangeable, you are permanently excused from changing it, and also from deciding how much of your situation (e.g. the climate) is unchangeable, how much can be changed, and how much is caused by habit or tradition or your own need to be a victim (37).

Anger or scorn is directed against both fellow victims and oneself, since everyone in this category are defined as inferior. “The basic game in Position Two is Victor or Victim” (Atwood 37).

Maneck in A Fine Balance becomes the suitable example for this position. He is the most fragile of the main characters, can not accept the alienation and meaninglessness of his life as a foreign technician in Dubai, while the still-impoverished and horribly mutilated tailors cheerfully visit with Dina. “The three survivors have lost as much as Maneck had gained, materially, yet they remain true to each other, and they manage to boost their spirits by dining together in secret, behind Nusswan’s back”(Brians 162).

Now Maneck loses hope though in the eyes of the world he is seen to be the man who made out successfully. Maneck comes back to India not just for his father’s funeral but because he wanted to find his place in this world, a sense of belonging. He comes
with colourful hopes to Bombay to meet his old friends but on seeing their reduced state, he is disheartened. He commits suicide believing that “everything ends badly”. His hopelessness is revealed through his beliefs which are explicit in his words. His victim position is seen to be an act of fate, nothing can be done about it, everything is over. His final hope has ended badly and failed him, he does not find what he was looking for. Unable to bear the reality, having lost the purpose for living, the last ray of hope being vanished, he chooses death. Maneck’s pessimism however starts to grow even more with Avinash and Shankar’s death. His symbol of life is the chessboard while Dina’s symbol is the quilt. The chess is a game where one has to lose for the other to win, carefully plotting to make the other player lose with a checkmate. On the other hand, the quilt is piecing everything together, both the joys and sorrows, and looking at life as whole and not in pieces.

Maneck feels trapped in Dubai. He compares himself with the maidservant he meets there. He is far better off than her, but still he feels trapped and helpless, just like her. “Of all the major characters, he comes from the most secured background, but is the most easily discouraged, and in the end, he is the most easily destroyed.”(Brians 160). His life in Dubai is meaningless as he feels like a foreigner in an alien land even after eight years of living there. He stresses on the fact how meaningless every endeavour seems to him.

Maneck’s sense of alienation starts from home when his parents decide to send him away to study. He writes in the letter to Dina before leaving for Dubai, “He’ll [Maneck’s father] feel better once I’ve gone, he just does not enjoy having me around. I
knew it the day he sent me to boarding school in the fifth standard” (Mistry 549). Mr and Mrs. Kohlah did this inorder to secure a better future for Maneck. But he feels the pain even after returning from Dubai eight years later, for his father’s funeral. He says “You sent me away, you and Daddy. And then I couldn’t come back. You lost me, and I lost-everything.”(591). Maneck finds sense in death, and admires the courage of three sisters who have committed suicide. He sees their picture in an old newspaper and eyes get glued to them.

He found himself admiring their courage. What strength it must have taken, he thought, to unwind those saris from their bodies, to tie the knots around their necks. Or perhaps it had been easy, once the act acquired the beauty of logic and the weight of sensibleness (Mistry 594).

From then on, we find Maneck contemplating positively on suicide. He recalls what Avinash had called his house “A house with suicidal tendencies” (Mistry 595) as it was connected with steel cables tethering the foundation to the cliff. He then moans in anguish, his anger is focused upon God and he thinks:

Where was God, the bloody Fool? Did He have no notion of fair and unfair? Couldn’t He read a simple balance sheet? He would have been sacked long ago if He was managing a corporation, the things He allowed to happen . . . to the maidservant, and the thousands of Sikhs killed in the capital, and my poor taxi driver with a kara that wouldn’t come off.

(Mistry 595)
Initially he believes that God is dead and then he prefers to think of him as a giant quiltermaker. However his idea about God has not improved for the better at all, it is hopeless then as it is now he says,

\[\ldots\text{With infinite variety of designs. And the quilt is grown so big and confusing, the pattern is impossible to see, the squares and diamonds and triangles don’t fit well together anymore, it’s all become meaningless. So He abandoned it’ (Mistry 340).}\]

Now he feels the pain of despair as his hope is slowly fading away with the familiar world, slowly but steadily slipping around him. Then he composes himself and reassures that he is going to prove to himself that everything does not have to end badly. “If there was an abundance of misery in the world, there was also sufficient joy, yes- as long as one knew where to look for it” (Mistry 598).

He places his final hope on his friends: he wants to see the life of Dina, Ishvar and Om and gain encouragement from them to change his despair. His statement becomes ironic as he does not know where to look for joy. He does not feel the bonding while meeting his relatives, the narrator states his feeling, “It was a bit like being the prize dog at a kennel show” (Mistry 599). Then he goes to meet Dina and admits to her that he found writing to anyone pointless.

After hearing the tragedy faced by his friends “his voice was lifeless” (Mistry 606). He rushes out of Dina’s house saying he would meet Ishvar and Om next time. He is unable to move from the streets, and as he is loitering meets Ishvar and Om in their reduced state, he wants to speak to them but his words of love and sorrow and hope
remained muted like stones. In the old Vishram hotel transformed to a bigger one, he reflects what his father used to tell him “only slow coaches get left behind” (610). Only he is left out, now there is nothing he can do to change the past nor the future as his hope is vanquished with the tragic state of his friends.

Did life treat everyone so wantonly, ripping the good things to pieces while letting bad things fester and grow like fungus on unrefrigerated food? Vasantrao Valmik the proofreader would say, it was all part of living that the secret of survival was to balance hope and despair, to embrace change. (Mistry 440)

Maneck’s meaningless life seems unbearable to him. All this misery and suffering seems unending. Thereby succumbing everything as fate, he gives up his life in front of a train as he firmly believes “everything ends badly” there is nothing more to do. Though he associates his reason for being a victim to fate he is not content with the fact thereby he chooses to end his life. He, unlike Shankar, who has assigned his victim position to fate and is content about facing his life or victimization as it is, chooses death to end his misery. Maneck thinks earlier in the novel while staying with Dina at a time when the tailors are carried away forcefully to the irrigation project site: “Everything ended badly. And memory only made it worse, tormenting and taunting. Unless you lost your mind. Or committed suicide. The slate wiped clean. No more remembering, no more suffering” (Mistry 336).
Maneck shuttles his victim position. First he is in position two, wherein he thinks it is an act of fate, then he reassures he is going to prove himself that everything does not have to end badly, thereby moving to position three. But he is locked into his anger and failed to change his situation, he finds himself back in position two. In that position he gives up hope. In *A Fine Balance* there is Shankar the maimed beggar who comes under the care of the Beggarmaster. He moves from position two to position four. Initially his victim position is accepted as an act of fate, he is content with what life has offered him and finds pleasure in kind acts shown to him by people in his profession, he is all praise for his Beggarmaster. He does not see the Beggarmaster as one exploiting him in order to earn his living. Though he is fully aware of the fact that he is shown favour in his employer’s eyes as he earns him the highest profit, however, he is very grateful to the Beggarmaster. The Beggarmaster is like the insurance company as Dina rightly points out. As the Beggarmaster himself states, “My business is looking after human lives” (Mistry 366). Then he moves to position four as his condition does not bother him. When Om enquires about what happened to his legs and hands, there is no self pity, as he replies: “‘Don’t know exactly. Always been like this. But I’m not complaining, I get enough to eat, plus a reserved place on the pavement. Beggarmaster looks after everything’” (327).

He even enjoys the task of caring for the sick in the forced irrigation project site. He finds a new purpose for himself by serving others. When the tailors fall sick he takes care of them, he brings them food and he watches with satisfaction as they take their first bite. Ishvar is touched when he shows concern for his injured foot; the narrator states his
gratitude, “that he who had no feet should care so much about another’s” (Mistry 359). The narrator states Shankar’s new role,

Shankar was assigned to ferrying the patients’ meals. He enjoyed the task, looking forward eagerly to mealtimes, paddling his platform from the hot kitchen to the groaning huts with the newfound sense of purpose. At every stop he was showered with the invalids’ grateful thanks and blessings (Mistry 359).

Kip in The English Patient is an Indian Sikh working for as a British sapper. He risks his own life everytime to defuse a bomb and save the British people. “He has suddenly a map of responsibility, something, he realized that Lord Suffolk carried within his character at all times” (Ondaatje 208). It was this awareness which gave him later the need to section off his humanity when he was working with the bomb. “When he worked, clarity and music filled him, the human world extinguished” (120). He is considered as a fool by his brother for trusting the English. “One day, he says, I will open my eyes. Asia is still not a free continent, and he is appalled at how we throw ourselves into English wars” (229).

Kip like Maneck in A Fine Balance is seen searching for a sense of belonging. Kip is in Position three wanting to prove his brother’s notion of the West oppressing the East wrong. He feels at home with Lord Suffolk, and after his death finds closeness in his relationship to Hana as she links him to humanity. But when the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki he is filled with rage as he is certain that the U.S. would not do something so terrible to another white nation.
Now his face is a knife. The weeping from shock and horror contained, seeing everything, all those around him, in a different light. Night could fall between them, fog could fall, and the young man’s dark brown eyes would reach the new revealed enemy.

My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed-by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For this to happen? (Ondaatje 302-303)

Then the bomb becomes the symbol of western aggression. Locked in his anger he threatens to kill the English Patient whom he sees as a symbol of the west. Though the English Patient is not even English, Kip says, “American French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman.” (Ondaatje 304). Instead of killing him he leaves to India. Unlike Maneck he does not commit suicide but flees back to the security of his homeland leaving Hana and everything else he held dear for so long. Thereby he moves from position three to position two as he is locked in his anger and fails to change his position. Leaving everything to the hands of fate, and seeing his state to be a fulfillment of his destiny as he becomes a doctor as predetermined and is married in India, when he looks back after thirteen years and thinks about Hana half way across the globe. Even Hana runs back to the security of her home once Kip leaves her and the English patient dies. Then there is Madox who returns to his
village in Somerset, where a month later he shoots himself in the church unable to bear the sermon in honour of war.

Katherine on the other hand is in position three initially as she tries to be another wife here with Almasy but knowing about the effect it would have on her husband, she breaks up the relationship and moves to position two as she leaves it to destiny to mark the next course. “From this point on in our lives, she had whispered to him earlier, we will either find or lose our souls” (Ondaatje 168).

Position Three: Repudiating the Victim Role

Moving on to Position Three as stated by Atwood “To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable”(37). In this position one does not see himself as a fated victim. It is a dynamic position wherein the real cause for oppression is realized for the first time, thereby anger can be directed against the real source of oppression and energy channeled into constructive action. There is a real decision made about how much of the victim position can be changed and how much can not. “The basic game of Position Three is repudiating the Victim role” (Atwood 38).

In A Fine Balance, Ishvar, Om, Dina, all believe that their victim positions can be changed. They strive and struggle for a better future, one with dignity. In their struggle for independence they come together and face a number of obstacles but their spirit of hope is that these sufferings are only passing clouds and when the clear sky comes out they will have a better future which never fades. When one gets distressed,
there is always the other shoulder to boost up his spirits and support him. Their relationship starts with mutual needs and grows into something more fine. A sense of unity and togetherness is found. They are no longer any demarcations, only mutual love and understanding. Dina struggles for independence from her dominating brother Nusswan. Ishvar and Om struggle for dignity from their caste ridden hierarchy.

As Goldblatt has it gradually the lives of the tailors are entwined with Dina Dalal, their employer, revealing a portrait of people grappling with an inconstant world that preys, manipulates, and most often devours the poor (94). The security of home and family support are continually knocked away in the lives of these characters. The relationship between Dina and Maneck gets off to an awkward start. She has not had an unrelated man stay in her home before, and Maneck has never shared his home with anyone other than his parents. Maneck is caught by having to live out his parent’s dream for him as a student of engineering, which he eventually abandons. He finds the college dorm where he first stayed unbearable, and he is happy to move into Dina’s apartment.

Dina’s insecurity is revealed as soon as the two tailors begin sewing for her in her apartment and living on an acquaintance’s roof. She is uneasy about the tailors as she fears they will try to cut her out of the garment business, so she goes to take extra measures of cautionary steps to see that they do not know where she is working and getting the orders from. She goes to the extent of keeping the tailors as virtual prisoners in her home when she is away to deliver or picking up more materials and patterns for her new order. A third story involves the Beggarmaster, who operates a large network of
street beggars, and who eventually extends his service of protection to Dina and the tailors for regular payment, when she has trouble with the landlord.

Moments of fun and relaxation are fleeting: a teatime chat, a massage on the beach, a concert, a lover’s embrace are the memories to which our characters cling, for the occurring onslaught of troubles wreak havoc on the lives of unfortunates who possess little money or influence in a world where connections can make the difference between life on the street or protected subsistence (Goldblatt 94).

Yet, Mistry endows his characters with pride and determination to continue on in their daily journeys. When Ishvar and Om’s temporary shelter in the jhopadpattis are shattered by bulldozers in the name of its beautification, they stubbornly refuse to tell Dina and eventually make arrangements to sleep outside the chemist shop. Om’s nightmares finally cease so that he can dream of wasted fields transformed “into garden(s) teeming with flower and butterflies and he can make love on a magic carpet of clouds” (Goldblatt 94). Similarly Dina reaches into her past when her husband Rustom dies in an accident. She improvises her sewing with the help of Darab uncle and Shirin Aunty, so she can be independent and will not have to return to her brother, Nusswan.

Each of the characters rise to fulfill their destiny, filling themselves with tenacity and courage instead of an unfeeling, embittered coldness. They move on with courage to face whatever life has handed them. Though they long for those sustaining days of familial love, yet, each knows that they or she can not linger in the nostalgia of the past. There is no chance to linger but to continue on to sustain their mere survival in a world
so unkind that begging is made into a profession, where some are purposely handicapped
to eek out the greatest pity in alms from the people. In his presentation Mistry evokes the
widows, the orphans, the masses ravaged by a government so simple and savage that it
believes that by removing the homeless from the streets they will simply cease to exist.

When the tailors are taken by force to the irrigation project site and do not return back for a few weeks, Dina is worried. Her fragile independence could end at any time as she lives life on the edge. The first day when the tailors do not turn up she plans on visiting them at night, and then Maneck points out that would show her to be deperate. Then she replies, “‘I am not helpless,’ she said emphatically. ‘Just one more difficulty in life, that’s all it is.’” (Mistry 334). Though she identifies her victim position and is anxious for the tailors return, she composes herself and restates her independence, not depending on the tailors or anyone else for her freedom. Each problem is seen as one more step for a better future. Her optimism wears out in the end. As Ishvar points out, “Stories of suffering are no fun when we are the main characters” (383).

Ishvar and Om come to the city with the hope of saving enough for both of them to return back to their village and start a tailoring shop. And Ishvar talks with determination to Maneck in their first meeting at the station, he says, “And reach it, we will, Nothing is as fine as one’s native place.” (Mistry 7). Maneck on the other hand has come to better his prospects by studying refrigeration and air-conditioning to secure a better future. The three of them come to the city and are nostalgic about their native place. Hence they want to change their prospects here in the city of dreams and head back as soon as possible.
Each of the characters of this quartet aspires in a changing society to transcend the constraints of birth, caste or sex in a modern, urban world where anything seems possible. Mrs. Gandhi’s radical enforcement of slum clearance and population control increase the misery of millions; politics is destiny, changing only in form, not essence. Caste remains “the invisible line” despite the Mahatma’s purifying message.

Mistry’s narrative moves smoothly between the present and the past that forms the characters lives and India’s, contrasting the illusionary hopes of independence with the bitter corruption of a society where “justice is sold to the highest bidder”. Individual selfless acts like that of Ishvar and Narayan who save their Muslim patron and his family during the Partition riots are obliterated by crushing misfortunes. Valmik the proofreader’s belief of maintaining a fine balance between hope and despair does not save the characters.

Integrity without power is poignantly weak: it elicits the readers helpless compassion for the lives Mistry creates with numerous human touches, felicitously symbolized by the partly coloured quilt Dina labouriously stitches. Ironically, power and integrity coalesce in Beggarmaster, who controls and protects a beggar army whose pervasive presence in the “rotting body of the metro polis”; this novel idea signals honour especially in the resourceful, limbless Shankar.

* A Fine Balance* can be compared to *Midnight’s Children*: its more traditional Balzacian mode, foreshadowed by the epigraph from Le Pere Gorriot, may well involve its readers more profoundly (Thorpe 225).
In the _The English Patient_ all the four characters Hana, Carravagio, Kip and the English Patient are from different nationalities, they try to make them useful during the war and the British acknowledge their services as long as they are useful and later they are caught and destroyed because they belong to a different nation. The villa symbolizes these four lives who are momentarily thrown into a war not of their own and their lives are destroyed by it significantly as they are proven that during war nothing is more important than one's nationality. “Perhaps this villa is a similar tableau, the four of them in private movement, momentarily lit up, flung ironically against this war” (Ondaatje 296).

Hana works all her youth in taking care of the British people wounded in war. “Throughout the war, with all of her worst patients, she survived by keeping a coldness hidden in her role as a nurse. I will survive this. I won’t fall apart at this” (Ondaatje 50). After working continuously for three full days with her patients, she is so wearied that he lies down beside a dead man and sleeps for twelve hours shutting herself from the outside world. She cut her hair convincing herself that “she would have nothing to link her, to lock her, to death” (Ondaatje 52). Nurses too became shell-shocked from all the dying around them and they began to believe in nothing, trusted nothing. Hana broke in Santa Chiara Hospital when she was given a letter that told her of her father's death who died in another part of the war far away from her. When Carravagio finds Hana crying in the night he thinks, “The deepest sorrow, he thought. Where the only way to survive is to excavate everything” (Ondaatje 46). Her profession as a nurse made her come to terms with death at a closer level, the narrator states Hana’s predicament “Hello Buddy, good-
bye Buddy. Caring was brief. There was a contract only until death. Nothing in her spirit or past had taught her to be nurse” (Ondaatje 53). Later she and the English Patient decided to stay alone in the deserted Itallian villa, the war was over for them and they refused to move along. Once when she catches the glimpse of a mirror she had grown too deep pulling herself inward that, she was no longer able to recognize herself. Thereby she loses her sense of intimacy with human relationships until she meets Kip.

Carravagio, the Canadian thief’s skills are legitimized during war, he worked for the British intelligence and finally he was accidently photographed and caught by the Germans when trying to retrieve the photo, and he loses his thumbs. As he tells Hana,

I was in a tuxedo, a monkey suit, in order to get into this gathering, a party, to steal some papers. Really I was still a thief. No great patriot. No great hero. They had just made my skills official (Ondaatje 37).

The irony is that when he was a thief he was not caught and mutilated like this. It was when he was working for the British intelligence not for his own selfish gains but for the sake of a nation at war he is mutilated and never feels whole again and becomes a morphine addict. For sometime he finds himself starring only into the thumbs of men filled with envy. Throughout his life he admits he had avoided permanent intimacy, he says “Till the war he had been a better lover than a husband” (Ondaatje 123). But war has unbalanced him and he can not go back to any other world as he is.
There is another character named Geoffery Clifton, who on knowing the illicit affair of his wife with Almasy, plans a suicide-murder that would involve all three of them, but the plane misses the target and only he dies, leaving Katherine fatally wounded. He thereby is in Position three as he wants to do something about his position by taking revenge, but he is also willing to give up his life in the process.

Position Four: Creative Non – Victims:

The fourth category of basic victim positions as Atwood’s own words is to be a “creative non-victim” (38). This position is for ex-victims or non-victims who have been able to move into it from Position Three because the external/internal causes which made them into victims have been removed.

In Position Four, creative activity of all kinds becomes possible. Energy is no longer being suppressed (as in Position One) or used up for displacement of the cause, or for passing your victimization along to others (Man kicks Child, Child kicks Dog) as in Position Two; nor being used for the dynamic anger of Position Three. And you are able to accept your own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it to make it correspond with others’ versions of it (particularly those of your oppressors).

In Position Four, Victor/Victim games are obsolete. You don’t even have to concentrate on rejecting the role of Victim, because the role is no longer a temptation for you.
(There may be a Position Five, for mystics; I postulate it but will not explore it here, since mystics do not as a rule write books.) (Atwood 39)

The English Patient in *The English Patient*, like Maneck in *A Fine Balance* keeps moving from one position to another. The English Patient, whose real name is Count Ladislaus de Almasy, is a Hungarian by birth which is revealed only in the IX chapter, until then he is referred to as the English Patient. Initially in the desert he loses his identity and finds his skill useful, and thereby immerses himself in it. At this state he is in Position One as he does not identify himself as a victim. He believes the desert can erase his past and reveal him for his capabilities. Then he moves on to position three when he finds he is arrested just because his name sounds foreign during World War II. He was just another second rate spy from the desert an international bastard according to them. As the English Patient tells Hana,

‘Kip and I are both international bastards-born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives. Though Kip doesn’t recognize that yet. That’s why we get on so well together.’ (Ondaatje 188-189)

He identifies his victim position and wants to change this predicament, and therefore escapes from there and reaches the cave after three years. He makes a deal with the Germans to return to the cave by giving them the desert mapping and also transporting a spy named Eppler to Cairo. According to him it is not an act of betrayal, as after that point nothing mattered to him except returning back. From there he moves on to position four when he is burned beyond recognition and becomes the English
Patient. His victim position does not trouble him now and thereby he is not in conflict with anyone or anything. As his plane catches fire he feels,

He is old. Suddenly. Tired of living without her. He can not lie back in her arms and trust her to stand guard all day all night while he sleeps. He has no one. He is exhausted not from the desert but from solitude. Madox gone. The woman translated into leaves and twigs, the broken glass to the sky like a jaw above him (Ondaatje 187).

When Carravagio tells him that he was watched closely and had become their enemy by starting an affair with Katherine and they wanted to kill him in Cairo but that is where they lost him, he murmured “I suppose it doesn’t matter” (Ondaatje 271). When Kip sees him as a symbol of the western aggression and points the rifle at him he says, “Do it, Kip. I don’t want to hear any more” (Ondaatje 303).

The other suitable examples in *A Fine Balance* would be Dina, Ishvar and Om. They change from Position three to Position four. Their struggle for independence comes at a cost. The cost is too steep as the price for their dignity is their very existence. Thereby they all succumb to the very thing they are fighting for- (i.e) self-respect. Dina, after all her struggles, goes back to her brother’s place to take the role of an unpaid maid. Ishvar and Om turn into beggars, they are reduced to a state far worse than what they were before their struggle. Now their victim position does not bother them anymore. They are able to accept their own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it or make it comply with other versions. The vigour they have for change, in order to alter their situation is all wiped out with the toll of Emergency in their lives. Their suffering is
hierarchical as one is better than the other. Dina is better off compared to the tailors Ishvar and Om and in turn they are better than Shankar. Thereby they can be a source of comfort to each other, by extending a helping hand. Maneck is better than all of them, even when he is working in Dubai his alienation is far better than that of the maidservant he meets there who has no way out. Still he finds himself to be the miserable one of the lot.

They have fought with all they have had and finally have given up their resistance and succumbed to what the society has offered them. They merely exist physically but even in their miserable state there is a slight ray of hope, as they stick together while facing their problems. Life in the city has definitely left its mark on them, but it has also brought the three together. Even in their lowly position they stretch out a helping hand to each other in whatever meager way possible. Although *A Fine Balance* is a dark novel, it is not a hopeless one. Mistry wants us to see that even the seemingly powerless can help each other to a certain extent, if they will.

Hopelessness creeps in when humanity fades away. But it would take more than such kindly gestures to heal the broken society he depicts in *A Fine Balance*. The novels cover page has an image of a girl balanced on a long pole, which is in turn balanced on a man’s thumb, depicting the horrific “act” presented by Monkey Man in Chapter IX.

“When your best hope for supporting your children involves deliberately risking their lives, something is seriously wrong that individual action can not fix” (Brians 162). Avinash may have been defeated by the government, but his example provides more hope than that of the self-defeating Maneck. Effective democratic action is needed to fix
the problems of these characters, but the novel offers no views on whether such action would take place. At best, it leaves us feeling “there are decent human beings in the world, even among-perhaps especially among- the most downtrodden, and the change, although sometimes extremely difficult, is always possible”. (Brians 162)

In the multifaceted portrayal of *A Fine Balance* it enfolds the readers to impact enduring memories of the helpless caught in the reign of Indira Gandhi’s government. Mistry’s villains are also portrayed as puppets in India’s repressive society. It is the human spirit that prevails in the end. From the haughty weak-eyed employer, who strictly believes in maintaining the distance between her and the tailors, Dina grows and becomes a friend to them. She goes to the extent of risking her life for the sake of the tailors. In the process of their bonding she has rekindled some of her happier memories of being with a family. Mistry’s characters are so real and life like that we feel their presence next door.

And life, Mistry seems to say, is like a quilt, each piece separate, unique, but the odd one colourful, bright, standing out, holding together the many dull, frayed and monotonous ones. In the final scenes of the story, the quilt that is supposed to be wedding gift for Om serves as cushion under Ishvar, “to rest his body upon: a comfort and a support, a visual patchwork of a life filled with many sorrows and few joys”(Goldblatt 94).
Atwood states her model of the four basic victim positions is only an aid to approach Canadian Literature. Victimization becomes the center that haunts the Canadian mind. She also stresses on three general points about her model. Firstly, it is a verbal diagram: it is intended to be suggestive rather than accurate. But experience is never linear, therefore the characters would be found in more than one position at a time. Secondly, she puts forth the question and also gives the answer of “what happens to an individual who has reached position three is in a society which is still in Position One or Two? (Not very nice things usually). You can not move to position three or four except by repudiating your society, or at least its assumptions about the nature of life and proper behavior” (42). Thirdly, the model is based on individual rather than social experiences. Thereby the terms would slightly shift when substituted by “we” for “I” and then we would get a more complicated analysis of Canadian colonialism.

As for the writer’s position Atwood states

. . . a lot of our literature (as you may have suspected) is either an expression or an examination of Position Two: “I am a victim but there is nothing I can do about it.” However, a writer’s job is to tell his society not how it ought to live, but how it does live (Atwood 42).

Atwood finally concludes her first chapter on “Survival” by giving some positive outlook on Canadian Literature’s obsession with victimization and survival. She states,
Although negative stances towards theme and image predominate, there are also examples of escapes, positive changes, and revelations.

Much of our literature is a diagram of what is not desired. Knowing what you don’t want isn’t the same as knowing what you do want, but it helps.

Naming your own condition, your own disease, is not necessarily the same as acquiescing in it. Diagnosis is the first step (Atwood 42).

There are at least five levels or strands of Indian society brought together in A *Fine Balance*: the Himalayan family of Maneck who shift from business class to middle class, whose father made his fortune in business but later steadily decreases in making profit; Dina’s brother Nusswan, who shift from the upper-middle class to business class; Dina marries into a middle class and ever since her husband’s death fights for her independence; Om and Ishvar representing the untouchables of the Hindu caste; Maneck’s college friend Avinash who represents the poor class trying to improve his state through his education but ultimately becomes a social activist and is killed by the police; and then we have the underworld of Beggarmaster, the hair-collector-Rajaram, whose sinister nature is shown in a positive light with a sense of humanity in the cruel struggle for survival; and the displaced villagers who wander the streets of Bombay helplessly, reduced to crime and begging.

Mistry presents the details of the intersecting lives with a microscopic precision that never seems boring or heavy handed. He offers little personal touches which lend beauty to the narrative, especially in the quilt that Maneck, Dina, Om and Ishvar
collaborate on as a testimonial of their lives together. Om and Maneck get along very well as they are both young men with the fire for life moving them. Dina and Ishvar are compelled by their class-consciousness particular to their age and experiences to try to discourage the two young men from becoming too friendly. In due course the four of them discover a common humanity. They are people who work hard, respect each other, and worry a great deal about their futures in uncertain times.

There are certain happy times in the otherwise bleak apartment when all the four lives are entwined together. Some instances like the four cooking together with Ishvar taking charge of it and Maneck persuading Dina to take care of some stray kittens he found living outside the kitchen window. Later Ishvar and Dina share the joy of Om’s prospective marriage. These moments are only fleeting clouds making the misery to be the more permanent sky than vice-versa.

Chapter Fifteen "Family Planning" becomes the twist in the tale. Om and Ishvar have returned home successfully and they are out shopping for Om's wedding when an old friend, Ashraf Chacha, tells them that a family planning clinic has just opened up in the village. Knowing too much about the kind of sterilization that goes on there, they all feel uncomfortable. The sinister background of the clinic's tents is kept off in hold for a moment as the two tailors receive a warm welcome from the villagers, but the celebration is seemingly short-lived as the police move in wielding nightsticks and herd Om, Ishvar and others onto the waiting trucks. Ashraf is murdered on the street, Om and Ishvar are sterilized, against their will, and held in the camp for four months until they make their return to Bombay. Due to the old family feud between Dukhi’s and Thakur
Dharamsi who have now grown in power with the Emergency, Om has been castrated. This is done as a reminder for others who dare oppose the people like Thakur Dharamsi. Though it seems to have been instigated by Om’s boldness to challenge Thakur Dharamsi, its motif goes deep into the past right up to Dukhi’s revolt leaving Om a eunuch. Reduced eventually to begging, Om supports the maimed Ishvar, who has lost a leg due to blood poisoning. Dina's life also changes as the State-of-Emergency has ruined Mrs. Gupta's dress trade. She moves in with her brother and takes the role of the unpaid servant. Maneck, who encounters his old friends on the streets pretends not to recognize them when he returns to Bombay for a visit. The pain is all too much for him: first he loses Avinash, and then his replacement in Om. Manek commits suicide on the train tracks. In the end, Om, Ishvar and Dina still find a way to be together: she surreptitiously feeds them from her brother's table and they do a little mending for her. Most of all they keep each other’s spirits up as their lives go on in a fine balance between the binary opposites of life and death, sorrow and happiness, freedom and restraint.

History in Mistry’s Novel:

While there is pathos in Mistry's novel, the history wards off sentimentality. A Fine Balance spans eleven years, from 1975 to 1984. The novel, which won four international prizes and was short-listed for four more, is described by reviewers as "ambitious in scope" (Rubin), as a "monumental new novel," of "an heroic canvas" and as "a domestic novel that refuses to remain within its walls" (Mojtabai). None of Mistry's reviewers seem disturbed that he has chosen to write a contemporary historical novel,
though A. G. Mojtabai finds herself "loosing touch with Ishvar and Dina" as the novel progresses and "interior journeys" are not presented (29). In the main, reviewers appear satisfied with Mistry's ability to capture "the real sorrow and inexplicable strength of India" (Iyer) as he treats "India both kindly and harshly" (Ross 239). Robert L. Ross's essay, "Seeking and Maintaining Balance," is the first U.S. published critical essay on Mistry's fiction. Ross ponders how much interest Western audiences can be expected to have in Indian politics as he writes in *World Literature Today*:

> Another question arises when considering these two novels (*A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*; Jowney [1991]): does the exposed political corruption and tyranny during Indira Gandhi's tenure still hold that much interest? She is long dead... The tempest that is Indian politics before, during, and since Mrs. Gandhi's years in power probably fails to intrigue most readers of Mistry's work. It is not the history of the actuality that attracts in Mistry's fiction, but the way he uses these elements... he transforms historical situations and the reality of Indian life into a metaphor that shows how the individual reacts to widespread corruption when tangled in its grasp... and how people respond to the endless forms of tyranny that government and society inflict. (240)

While Beverly Schneller agrees that Mistry integrates the history of India in a way that is relevant to and enhances the theme of *A Fine Balance*, she disagrees with Ross's assumption that the incorporation of accurate historical information fails to attract readers. Ross appears to suggest that in Mistry's latest novel, history can be separated
from the fiction, which she contends it cannot. The use of history is not limited to images and metaphor as the State-of-Emergency is a violent character in the novel, and as such, needs to be explored. “Indira Gandhi (1917-1984), who was active in the independence movement in the 1930s and 1940s, became a member of the Indian Congress in 1950; party President 1959; Minister of Information in 1964; and Prime Minister in 1964” (Schneller 235). The State-of-Emergency was declared in June 1975 after Mrs. Indira Gandhi was found guilty of electoral corruption. She enforced censorship, limited civil liberties, and carried out social engineering among the poor. “Removed in 1977 when the Congress Party lost the elections, she returned to politics as head of the Indian National Congress in 1978 and as Prime Minister in 1980. In 1984, she was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard, which led to the retaliatory deaths of 3,000 Sikhs” (235). This assassination is the subject of recent Indian literature, and A Fine Balance spans the whole of Gandhi’s first term as Prime Minister. The reality and historical situations is mirrored through the lives of Om, Ishvar and the community in which they live.

Mistry relies on the reader to recognize the validity of his portrayal of the effects of the State-of-Emergency on the Indian poor. As Naomi Jacobs says, when writers use historical or pop-culture figures there is "a concentrated code reference to an elaborate set of associations in the reader's and writer's mind" (110). These associations are revealed now. For Om, Ishvar and the other lower caste characters, the State-of-Emergency leads to arrests, beatings and the destruction of shanty homes in an atmosphere of widespread confusion. “The declaration served as a means for Mrs.
Gandhi to lash out on the whole country and to punish the easily abused poor. One must read the State-of-Emergency as a Hydra-like occurrence, in which the tentacles of government reached across the entire subcontinent, destroying lives in its wake” (Schneller 235). Dina's apartment serves as a safe-haven for Om and Ishvar, who are otherwise homeless at the wrong time. Their caste prohibits them from climbing out of poverty, though they are incredibly diligent and talented tailors. They are judged by their appearances and the outward signs of their caste's poverty, even though they are literate, they are saving money from their wages for Om's wedding, paying their bills on time, and generally minding their own business by being a good citizen. They are criminalized for being who they are, which is ironic when one recalls that Dina is actually breaking the law by having them work and live in her apartment and the sinister, but oddly likeable hair collector, Rajaram, is a murderer.

Reading the 1999 Human Rights Watch report, “Broken People: Caste Violence against India's Untouchables”, underscores the extent of the hardship and the violence the poor of India face and with which Mistry seems well acquainted. The report's major finding, in the context of its relevance to A Fine Balance, is how through "a series of inefficient and corrupt state governments since the early 1970s... government officials ... have acted as agents and turned a blind eye to the killings, displacements, and police led attacks on rural villagers, called Dalits (Untouchables)” (43). Women and those who would dare engage in social activism are routinely singled out for beatings and other acts of violence, which are termed attacks on modesty. The report describes "the criminalization of social activism" (153-165) and details on cases similar to Om's one
man resistance to the vasectomy. Mistry's ability to grasp and portray the lives of the poor, especially how they "languish in makeshift homes on government property" (99) is particularly realistic as Om and Ishvar find themselves mingling with displaced members of Indian society during the State-of-Emergency.

“Broken People” elucidates and *A Fine Balance* enlivens the patterns and types of violence and state sponsored oppression. Started in the 1970s they are still much in evidence, lending credibility to "the fine balance," the thin, delicate balance which is daily life in India. The State-of-Emergency is Manek Kohlah's nemesis. As a young man who descends into the underworld of Bombay, he fails to survive. A victim of repression in a way that differs from the experience of Om and Ishvar, Manek will not be a hypocrite. His wealth and education would enable him to rise or, to at least do well, but this is irreconcilable with the mass suffering of the Indian people as experienced by his extended family in Bombay. Out of loyalty and in response to their dignity, Manek jumps to his death; his last memory is that of his murdered friend from college, whose parents he had lately met. From the start, Manek is ill-suited to urban Bombay; he is always uncomfortable with what seemed normal to those who had become acculturated to certain levels of squalor and poverty in order to survive. Lacking survival skills, with his head literally in the clouds, Manek is lost in a world without beauty. Mistry's decision to tell a story of personal courage, resilience, hope and dignity in a
destructive world redefines the family by crossing classes and economic barriers (Schneller 235).

Pamela Dunbar addresses the importance of family in the postcolonial novel when she writes; "The use of [the family] implies a skepticism about the healthy survival of the wider community during a period of historical uncertainty" (103). Readers who know Indian history realize that what Dina, Om and Ishvar have will once again be tested in 1984, the year of the novel's Epilogue, and Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. The balance is once more upset. “Gandhi's period as Prime Minister repeatedly tested the character of India and Indians' ability to balance hope and despair” (Schneller 235).

Facing Reality becomes Survival:

Survival in its broader sense can mean both mental and physical. As Atwood states there are both grim survival as opposed to bare survival. What is freedom if it is not being practically applicable? The cost of surviving sometimes leaves the characters with nothing more than what they already had. The very fact that they escaped these ordeals and have their life as their proof of victory makes us to question survival. After all the traumas faced for surviving the very purpose gets defeated when one loses the purpose for which they are living, when the hope is lost life becomes meaningless and thereby the very act of living becomes a burden.

Trials and tribulations are always present in the road for achievement. No change comes without opposition. The first step for change is the very act of accepting the truth and facing reality as it is. When the first step is achieved there will be clarity of thought for possible solutions. There are certain things that can be changed and others that can
not. Once you have made this demarcation one will be able to see the kind of changes possible and strive towards making those changes with possible practical solutions. Thereby one must first identify the problem, make the change wherein he will be faced with obstacle. These obstacles must be tackled with an ardent spirit of perseverance and renewed strength of hope. The goal must be worthy of the suffering it causes.

The key factor for survival is hope; when that is lost it leads to despair and the characters like Maneck commit suicide. One must be able to balance both the joy and sorrows of life. The acceptance of both as part and parcel of life and thereby maintaining a fine balance between both becomes vital for the art of survival as the novel’s philosopher rightly points out.

Mistry has tried to portray the multi-cultural Indian society. The farce in the name of religion and politics is highlighted. Casteism is given vital importance in the novel. Om and Ishvar do not face this cruelty only in the village; Dukhi’s sacrifice in order to give them a better life accounted for nothing in the end, as they succumbed to the very same lethal force of caste in the city as in the village. In this new land of hope, despair comes to them in the name of Emergency. Finally they are left with even lesser than what they had before. But they do not commit suicide like Maneck, even though the dreams and aspirations for them to create a better future are buried deep down into the realm of politics and casteism. They accept their fate and go on with their life.

Caste is considered by many like Gandhi to be a crime, as he says, caste poisons the Hindu society as a drop of arsenic poisons milk. Even then they strongly believe in pertaining to the traditional norms of class hierarchy. They just want to make it more
human, not abolish it. As the fact of having the demarcation between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ it gives a larger emphasis on the superiority of one over the other. The ironic factor between caste and race is that they work on the same principle, one is demarcation between regions; the other between one’s own clan. The ironic factor hits that mostly the majority dominates as in all demarcations. It is only in casteism that minority dominates as the majority belongs to the opposite group of the ‘other’.

The questionable fact is why these groups can not stand together and fight for the rights? There are a few Dalit groups, among those there is the BSP, one which is powerful, having a Dalit leader Mayawati, but it has not brought in the desired results. Corruption and greed which increases with power ceased to improve the conditions of the Dalits though some changes were made. It then becomes a matter of comparison of, ‘which government is less corrupt?’

People are Slow to Change:

Bombay is no longer Bombay. “The official name of the city is now Mumbai, after a local female deity whose distinguishing characteristic is the lack of a mouth” (Kamdar 76). In the wake of decolonization and the retreat of the West, many cities in Asia that formerly sported Anglicized names have reindigenized them. “We are now used to Beijing instead of Peking. We are getting used to Yangon for Rangoon. Across India, the recovery of city names from Anglicized versions has been going on for some years: Baroda is now Vadodara, Poona is now Pune, Banares is now Varanasi” (76). But in Bombay's case, there is much more at stake in changing the name to Mumbai than the simple recovery of a name repressed under colonial rule.
In 1960, Bombay was made capital of the newly created state of Maharashtra. In 1966, the radically pro-Maharashtrian party, the Shiv Sena, was founded by a former newspaper cartoonist, Bal Thackeray. The party's name, which literally means "Shivaji's army," refers to the Hindu king, Shivaji, who defended the kingdom of the Marathas in the seventeenth century. One of the Shiv Sena's stated goals was to drive all non-Maharashtrians out of Bombay. Exploiting the frustrations of Maharashtrians, who made up roughly 40 percent of the city's population but who remained excluded from the top of the economic heap, Thackeray steadily expanded his political base over the next two decades. In 1985, the Shiv Sena took control of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, and its influence continued to grow. It was not until 1995, however, when a coalition of the Shiv Sena and the right wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party was elected to run the government of the state of Maharashtra that the name of the city was officially changed to Mumbai (Kamdar 76).

Many residents do not like the new name at all and defiantly continue to refer to their city as Bombay. Even the national government of India has announced that, to avoid unnecessary confusion, it will continue to refer to Mumbai as Bombay (and to Chennai as Madras, but that is a different story). “The name "Bombay" almost certainly derives etymologically from the word "Mumbai," which got altered as it passed through the mouths of first the Portuguese and then the British colonizers” (Kamdar 76). Indian
speakers of Marathi, Gujarati, and Hindi have always called the city Mumbai when referring to it in the vernacular. Still, for anglophones, foreign and Indian alike, who knows and love Bombay, it is hard to swallow the name change. “Even to non-speakers of English in India, the name "Bombay" has an allure, a magical quality (which derives in no small part from the city's film industry), that "Mumbai" does not.”Bombay" is as evocative in its own specifically resonant way as are "Paris," "Berlin," or "Rio"(76). Nor does Mumbai refer to quite the same city as Bombay. More important, the city of Mumbai does not belong to the same people as Bombay does, and a rather vicious fight is on to see whose city Bombay/Mumbai will be.

Many believe that Bombay, a city that prided itself for centuries on its cosmopolitanism and its tolerance, died in 1993. Following the razing in northern India of the Babri Masjid mosque by Hindu national extremists in late 1992, two large-scale riots, one in December 1992 and another, far worse, in January 1993, racked the city. Sixty-seven percent of the hundreds of victims were Muslims, who make up only 15 percent of the city's population. In March 1993, in apparent retaliation for the targeting of Muslims during the riots, bombs exploded at the Bombay Stock Exchange and the Air India Building in Nariman Point, two visible symbols of Bombay's standing as the business capital of India. The riots provided the Shiv Sena with an opportunity to display the extent of its control over the city. Hundreds of Muslims were systematically hunted
down and murdered, their homes ransacked, their shops looted, their factories burned to the ground (Kamdar 76).

Bombay's police, once considered one of the finest forces in India, aided and abetted the instigators of the carnage, and looked the other way, as innocents were slaughtered. Bal Thackeray openly bragged that the Shiv Sena was directly responsible for the riots and threatened to exercise his power to incite such mass violence on any future occasion he might deem appropriate. Although attempts were made, all the way up to the Supreme Court of Maharashtra, to hold him responsible for the bloodshed, the various cases were dismissed, and Thackeray has, to date, suffered no ill consequences from his involvement. What shook up the elite of the city was that even wealthy Muslims in posh areas were targeted, further underlining Thackeray's impunity and driving home the point that no one, no matter how rich, was safe. For the first time in Bombay's history, where money has always meant power, the rich were vulnerable. Under Thackeray's leadership, the Shiv Sena was fighting to seize control of the city's identity. Its members do not want Bombay to be a cosmopolitan city; they want Mumbai to be a Maharashtrian city. Hence the name change, the terror, the ongoing extortion and strong arming, the mass spectacles designed to fire up supporters. The Shiv Sena has been adept at channeling the pent-up frustrations of millions of the city's residents who, having come to Bombay from rural Maharashtra in search of opportunity, find themselves relegated to low level clerical and civic posts if they are educated, or work as domestics or casual laborers if they are not.
“Bombay is New York plus Hollywood, home to a film industry whose
distribution range stretches from the Persian Gulf all the way through Southeast Asia.
The city is a magnet for the dispossessed, the ambitious, and the star-struck from the
entire subcontinent” (Kamdar 76). Yet, though it attracts legions, it grants success to
very few, and by and large these have not been Maharashtrians. “The big money in the
city is, for the most part, in the hands it has been in since the seventeenth century: with
the Parsis, the Gujaratis, and, of course, the foreigners” (76). Many of the city's
dispossessed resent this unfair division of wealth and live in a state of constantly
frustrated expectations. The Shiv Sena's organizing strategy has been to focus the
frustration of unemployed and underemployed Maharashtrians against those, particularly
Muslims and South Indians, with whom they must compete for scarce, marginal, and ill-
paid jobs. As in A Fine Balance we find that the influx of the free labourers was a direct
threat to the paid day-labourers. Thereby harassment of the newcomers is constant. The
solution for their problem was simple as the narrator states: “. . . incapacitate the free
labour, and the jobs would return. Animosity between the beggars and pavement-
dwellers reached dangerous proportions” (Mistry 360).

The struggle between Mumbai and Bombay is not only a struggle over
the identity of one of the world's great cities. It is a contest between
provincialism and cosmopolitanism; a struggle between a city defined by
its relationship to the territory contiguous with it, in this case the state of
Maharashtra, and a city that is the economic engine of an entire country.
Bombay, with a population of 12-15 million (there are no reliable figures
for a city in which so many lack permanent housing), accounts for 38 percent of the total income tax revenues of a country whose population exceeds 900 million. The port of Bombay is India's biggest; its international airport the country's largest. It is the home of the largest film industry (in terms of number of pictures produced per year) in the world. It is India's financial capital, and the Bombay Stock Exchange is the largest and most active stock market in South Asia. Most of the world's leading investment houses, including Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, and Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, have offices there. A great national and regional city, Bombay aspires to become a truly global city defined primarily as such cities are, by its relationship with other global cities (Kamdar 76).

The struggle for Bombay is a struggle between an internationalized, wealthy elite, which is allied with an emerging middle-class that increasingly identifies with and participates in the global consumer culture, at one extreme, and, at the other, the vastly more numerous poor who have become more or less irrelevant in the global, postindustrial world but who nevertheless still need to eat, continue to dream, and keep coming to the city. This struggle is not unique to Bombay. Most of the metropolises in the southern half of the world face similar problems. “A new geo-economic reality has emerged in which it appears that cities that cannot gain admittance to the network of global cities defined by New York, London, and Tokyo risk becoming irrelevant to the global economy altogether” (Kamdar 76). Meanwhile, they must deal with a hopelessly
overloaded and crumbling infrastructure while parceling out to their growing urban populations ever scarcer resources in an increasingly contaminated environment.

One need only mention Manila, Jakarta, Cairo, Sao Paolo, or Mexico City to conjure up images of severe pollution; traffic jams that slow commuting to a crawl for hours, shantytowns mushrooming on every spare square foot of available land. When decent housing, potable water, full-time jobs with benefits, and usable roadways exist in sufficient quantities for only a very few, people fight tooth and nail to be among the lucky ones (Kamdar 76).

For despite their problems, these cities are centers of wealth, industry, and entertainment, and as such they continue to attract far more millions of refugees from rural poverty than they can possibly accommodate decently. Bombay is indisputably India's best candidate for global city status. But can Bombay make it into the global league? The optimists among those who love the city bet that it will. The more clear-eyed believe its chances are slim.

Then there is the stark reality that hits on the face, it is not the laws that are lacking but the enforcement of the laws that are being deprived of. Why are the laws not being enforced even in the educated 21st century? The bare fact is that people are not slow to change but they are resistant to change, as change of any kind leads to new set of rules and principles. The age old practices have to be done away with or at least modified to give room to new ones. If this has to change the mentality of the people has to change. They must be broad minded in order to welcome the change.
What is the use of living just holding on to mere rituals and traditions? Meaningless rituals and traditions have to be altered to pave way for new ones; the culture changes with the society. The 21st century has seen a number of changes in the field of technology which is considered to be a boon. In the same way, the mentality of the people towards the age old practices such as racism and casteism should change, paving the way for a new and better future. What is good in tradition must be kept alive by practicing them, but the rest can be done away with.

Education is Fruitful only when theories are applied practically:

It is the society which creates a culture with changing trends for each milieu. Change for the better must be always welcomed. Education is not fruitful unless the theories learnt are applied practically. Education helps us to gain knowledge and knowledge must lead to the art of questioning the social issues and coming out with possible solutions. Thereby if something is considered to be wrong in the traditions of a society education must give them the courage to see the reality as it is and show the way for the change in mentality which leads to the progressive development of the society. This is portrayed in *A Fine Balance* with Dina’s gradual change of heart.

The two cup system which is still prevalent in some rural tea shops is portrayed in Dina’s house. The pink ones for the tailors and the red rose borders for herself and Maneck. We see her reluctance even in sharing the meal at the same table. But these are merely passing phases as she finds happiness in their company; their bonding grows stronger and releases her from loneliness. When Dina gives Om the two cups of tea
when they start staying on the verandah, the narrator states the change of heart explicitly with the two cup system,

    Noticing the red rose borders, he started to point out her error, ‘The pink ones for us,’ then stopped. Her face told him she was aware of it.
    ‘What?’ she asked, taking the pink cup for herself. ‘Is something wrong?’
    ‘Nothing’, his voice caught. He turned away, hoping she did not see the film of water glaze his eyes (Mistry 389).

Unity in Diversity:

    Dina’s change of heart is seen when Zenobia, her friend, who is shocked at the idea of Dina making room for Om’s future wife, tells they can find new tailors, Dina replies “But that’s not the point. I would let them stay even if they weren’t working for me (Mistry 548). Dina missed them and realized that, “. . . she had for the last few months, known what was a family?” (Mistry 550)

    Dina making Maneck and the tailors to be part of her family shows her change of heart. She comes over her sense of duty or need and crosses the careful line she had crafted between herself and her employees. Dina who used to be cautious about even her tea cups, now shares her entire life with them. Their absence for a short while makes her feel lonely and she rejoices at the thought of having to live as one family again with mutual understanding and love for each other.
Single drops of water accumulate to make an ocean. When change is met with opposition as it is due to be there should be unity among those who stand for the change and raise their voice against the social evils in a non-violent manner. As one starts voicing out, change starts happening. The voice of one can be easily silenced but the voice of many is heard; change can at least be a hope in the near future. Equality is opposed to diversity. But to find a way between both we need to strike a balance. Welcome the change needed, and stick to the roots as well’ this is called the art of survival.

Maggie Ann Bowers in her paper “Negotiating the Problem of Identity in “Multicultural” Canada: The Canadian Writing of Suniti Namjoshi and the Case for “Cross-culturalism” challenges the idea of Canada having achieved a harmonious multi-cultural society. Although at a political level this may seem obvious, particularly with Quebec’s push towards independence, the issue which she deals with is

...the covert racism which is consistently witnessed to by Canadian writers from non-Anglo, non-Franco groups, including the many Asian Canadian writers such as Himani Bannerji, Bharati Mukherjee, ... Suniti Namjoshi.(51)

The racism she is focusing upon seems to persist despite open gestures by the Canadian government to promote multi-culturalism among its people. Bower remarks, it is the day-to-day felt experience of prejudice towards individual non-Anglo/non-Franco minorities where racism is found. Thereby there is a contradiction between the government
policy of multi-culturalism and, at an individual level, occurrences of racism between citizens. However Bower argues that “it is the policy of “multiculturalism” which itself creates tension between groups, and is exacerbated by the self- assumed superiority of Anglo and Franco culture (52).

Bower clarifies certain terms which are used to describe the cultural make-up of Canadian society, and to identify their implications. She states,

. . . the use of the term “cross-culturalism” by contemporary North American feminists such as Elizabeth Meese poses a radical change of approach, away from “multi-culturalism” towards a notion of cultural identity which assumes a complete equality based on mutual respect through the recognition of mutual influence (52)

The cultural make-up of Canadian society is predominately described as “mosaic” and “multi-cultural”. “Mosaic” is the most preferred term to refer to the Canadian society. In this paper Bower draws attention to the implications of the terms “multi-culturalism” and “mosaic” with relation to social interaction.

The term “mosaic” assumes the retention of difference between distinct cultures which together produce a whole yet varied cultural pattern. The term “multiculturalism,” likewise, carries the implication that each cultural group, while contributing to society, remains separate and distinct. So, “multi-culturalism” allows for those with privilege to abuse the notion of “difference” as a means to fix and stereotype cultural identity and impose a hierarchy of value upon separate identifiable cultural groups. “Cross-
“culturalism” offers a preferable alternative as it dispenses with the notion of separate cultural groups by acknowledging the fluidity of cultural identity and the mutual influence of one cultural identity on another (Bower 52).

So, “multi-culturalism” allows the privileged to abuse the notion of “difference” (Bower 52). The ideal of “multi-culturalism” and the actuality of living it are a powerful source of irony in minority writing as identified by Linda Hutcheon in “Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies”. Suniti Namjoshi has a strong ironic tone, particularly while discussing the difficulties of human relations between people with different cultural identities. Namjoshi’s poem “How to be a Foreigner” acts as an illustration of her humorous ironic tone in relation to immigrant experience.

First
You take off your clothes,
Your titles and name
And put on a robe,
Sterile and clean,
With neat black letters
Marking THE STRANGER
Then.
You walk down the street,
Alone in fancy dress. (Namjoshi, More Poems)
The poem although seems simple on the outside expresses the specifically individual and personal reactions to immigrant experiences; “revealing the pathos and pain due to the stripping of familiar identity and the persistence of feelings of isolation, loneliness and awkwardness” (Bower 53).

Namjoshi’s *Conversation of Cow* centres on the search for identity by an Indian lesbian in Canada and her negotiations of the multiple forms of prejudice she is confronted with. Thereby it is in contrast with the two texts in analysis. First *The English Patient* in which Kip is an Indian, a Sikh, and works in the British army as a sapper and *A Fine Balance* where Maneck is an Indian, a Parsi, working in the Gulf (Dubai). Like Namjoshi who is triply “otherised” (to borrow a phrase from Gayatri Spivak) as a lesbian, as an Indian in white dominating western society, Mistry and Ondaatje are also “otherised” (qtd. in Bower 54). Mistry as an Indian, Parsi, who is now living in Canada but writes completely on India. Ondaatje on the other hand a Sri Lankan, Tamil, who also immigrated to Canada and is a versatile writer. Thereby both belong to the minority group and depict their sense of alienation in their works. Mistry’s *Tales of Firzosha Baag* reveals his life as Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*. The former is a collection of short stories where Kesar the only connection in all the stories reflect Mistry to a certain extent. The latter is an autobiographical work of Ondaatje.

Mistry’s and Ondaatje’s characters portray their position of otherness in differing ways, “revealing individual notions of self identity and personal strategies of resistance against “otherisation” (Bower 54). In this reason their work can be discussed in relation to Elizabeth Messe’s theory of identity and resistance. All the three propose “that the key
to positively negotiating human relations is held in attitudes towards self identity, and on
the deconstruction of cultural categorization” (54)

Ondaatje and the cross-cultural feminists assume that

. . . the West is structured on white patriarchal attitudes which dominate
through fixed societal structures of opposition in which the white, male,
middle-class view is positively valued and all “other” perspectives are
negatively valued. The theories of self identity can be expressed in terms
of De Beauvoir’s Hegelian notion of self in human relations. De Beauvoir
described her notion of self in relation to others as the “tragedy of human
consciousness” and noted that: “each separate consciousness aspires to set
himself [herself] by reducing the other to slavery” (qtd. in Bower 54)

In *A Fine Balance* we find Ishvar and Om letting go of their identity as Chamaars
which ultimately leads to becoming victims to the very same thing they fought against.
Likewise in *The English Patient* we find the English Patient letting go off his foreign
identity only to succumb to it later. During a time of crisis the truth stares right on the
face that nothing is more important than one’s identity. The search for identity dismisses
the very notion of one fixed identity by acknowledging that identity is entirely fluid, so
that contact between two people can be mutually influencing rather than a war of
confrontation and dominations. This is evident in *A Fine Balance* through Ishvar and
Om who are initially Chamaars then turn to Darjis. Even Dina who initially insists on
demarcation between herself and tailors later accepts them into her family. In the *The
We find how the characters Almasy, Kip, Hana lose their identity in the desert and are mutually influenced by one another.

Meese also notes that not only do people attempt to impose identities on to the other but that one’s identity is influenced by contact with other people, so that one’s sense of self identity is constantly shifting and changing in relation to each of the many people that one meets (Bower 56).

The suitable example is Almasy from *The English Patient* who is Hungarian but becomes a English Patient because he speaks English and was found by the British army burnt beyond recognition. One’s identity is unavoidably influenced by contact with other people. In *The English Patient* Katherine is the secret lover of Almasy but also the wife of Geoffery Clinton. Caravaggio is a Canadian thief who is later legitimized by war to be a British spy. Almasy and Kip though of different origins find their skills useful in a foreign land. The former immerses him in the desert and does its mapping, while the later buries his soul to his work as a British army sapper. Hana is a Canadian nurse who works for the British and dedicates herself in taking care of the English Patient in an Italian villa. All the four come together in the villa during World War II and are altered as they are influenced by each other while Hana and Kip eventually become lovers.

During the time of crisis like the World War II in *The English Patient* and Emergency in *A Fine Balance* we find the world neatly divided into two as Suniti, a major character, tells in Conversation of a Cow “Class A humans and Class B humans. The rest don’t count” (Bower 57).
In the *The English Patient* it is either a British or the other an ally or spy. In *A Fine Balance* it is rich or poor. Though Almasy and Kip are initially accepted by the British later on they feel the demarcation. This relationship is explicitly seen in Kip’s relationship to Lord Suffolk who treats him without any kind of racial prejudice and takes him under his wing. After his death Kip finds the prejudice of his colleagues disturbing. Even the English Patient is accepted earlier as a member in the desert exploration by the British; later on he is arrested because he is a Hungarian as his name sounds foreign.

By recognizing its fear, the ego is assured of its own existence and so does not have to place itself in opposition to others. Namjoshi thereby offers an alternative to the dilemma of the other. However, it relies upon the willingness of those in a position of power to adopt a non-conflictual attitude. Until the radical changer in power relations occur, the other must negotiate the inevitability of its otherisation and formulate a strategy of resistance (Bower 59).

However she does not, “. . . claim solely that the personal adaptation of a fluid identity and non-conflictual attitude itself would eradicate racism: what it offers is a resistance against it” (Bower 59). The suggestion made is that, an extension of these notions of personal identity provides a method of combating racism and casteism through the adaptation of a policy of cross-culturalism rather than multi-culturalism.

Because identity is both fluid and mutually influencing no one person can be said to be the sole influencer/dominator over another. In each
relationship there is a mutual interactive influence, even if it be in imbalance. We can say that no person in a country with many cultural influences can therefore claim to be influenced solely by one culture (Bower 59-60).

In Canada as in India, the cultural identity of each person is multiplied and constantly being influenced cross-culturally and so categorizing cultural groups becomes impossible. This is not to say that all Canadians and Indians would adopt a normalized identity but that Canadian and Indian identities would be unique to each person, the product of multiple and various influences.

The adoption of cross-culturalism as a policy as opposed to multi-culturalism in Canada and India encourages the recognition of mutual influence and with it mutual respect between different cultural groups would emerge. It would thereby dispense with falsely imposed categories of cultural identity and fixed stereotypes which force the people into a power struggle between cultural groups. As Meese states: “There is no end to this process of composing and being composed, figuring . . . we are always (being) represented and representing (‘being’) (Bower 60).

Cross-culturalism therefore talks about the impact of one culture over another. It stresses on unity rather than demarcations. While ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘mosaic’ stresses on the demarcation in maintaining one’s individuality and thereby contributing to the society at large, cross-culturalism stresses on the acceptance of cultural influence of one over the other and thereby seeing how similar we are than how different. This attitude would pave the way for unity with the change in mentality over the social demarcations.
Voicing out for the voiceless becomes a great responsibility. This responsibility in every citizen could pave the way for a better society if social issues such as casteism and racism are being voiced out.