A Study of *Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance* and *Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters*
Rohinton Mistry’s ‘A Fine Balance’

Rohinton Mistry is considered to be one of the foremost authors of Indian heritage in English. In the novel *A Fine Balance* there are four characters, two among them are tailors who are forcibly sterilized, one is a student who emigrates and the fourth is a widowed seamstress. The corrupt and brutal government has just declared a state of emergency and the country is on the edge of chaos.

Rohinton Mistry creates unforgettable characters and vast social panorama. The novel gives us a vivid picture of life for the members of the untouchable caste in remote villages. It deals with the consequences communal riots, the effects of riots on characters, women as victims of riots and political differences resulting in partition.

**Life and Works of Rohinton Mistry:**

Rohinton Mistry was born in 1952 in Bombay, India of Parsi descent. He earned B.A. in Mathematics and Economics at the University of Bombay. In 1975, at the age of 23, he immigrated to Canada, where he studied at the University of Toronto and received a B.A. in English and Philosophy. Later he moved to Canada with his wife and settled in Toronto. He worked as a bank clerk for some time. He also took up to the study of English and Philosophy. Mistry had a flair for writing and his literary bend of mind made him express himself through the literary medium. Mistry published his short story entitled ‘One Sunday’ in the year 1983. This short
went on to win the first prize in the ‘Canadian Heart House literary Contest’ (1984). He wrote 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 among the eminent, writers of South Asia, in Canadian literary galaxy.

Although, Rohinton Mistry’s literary contribution is less in quantum, the quality 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:

2. Tales From Firozsha Baag (1992)

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’ (1991) and ‘The Trillium Award’. This novel went on to win the ‘Governor General’s Award’ (1991) and ‘The Common Wealth Writer’s Prize’ (1992)
for being voted the best book; and ‘The smith Books First Novel Award’ (1992).

_A Fine Balance_ won ‘The Governor General’s Award’ and ‘The Giller Prize’ (1995). This book was also short listed for ‘The Booker Prize’. Among the other awards received were the ‘Los Angeles Times Award’ (1997) and The Royal Society of Literature’s ‘Winifred Holt by Memorial Prize’ (1997).

_A Fine Balance_, Mistry’s most successful work tells the story of four characters (Maneck, Dina, Ishvar and Omprakash) and the impact of Indira Gandhi’s state of emergency on them. One of the most successful aspects of this book is its carefully crafted prose. This intricate opening paragraph, which is typical of the precise prose of _A Fine Balance_ throughout, helps propel the novel forward through what is one of the most memorable portraits of post-Independence India ever written.

Mistry’s _Family Matters_ was awarded ‘Canadian Author’s Association Award’ (2003), ‘Kiriyama Pacific Rim Book Prize’ (2002) for literature. This novel was short listed for the Booker prize.

Rohinton Mistry is different from the others due to the fact that he always attempts to move from ethic enclosures to wider transcultural spaces. This stands him apart very significantly. An in-depth study of Mistry’s works helps 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. Mistry presents through his works the various hurdles the Parsis face time and again in addition to the challenges that they accept. Mistry is totally into the Parsi World and proudly states that his writing on the Parsi will, ‘preserve a record of how they lived.

**Consequences of Communal Riots:**

According to Rohinton Mistry, in his own right it is more difficult to situate in the genre of Indian Writing in English. Born in India to a Parsi family, Mistry migrated to Canada at a very early age. This places him in the genre of the Diasporic writers of India. Mistry finished his college in Bombay and moved to Canada. There he worked as a clerk in a bank and enrolled himself into an English literary figures.

Mistry’s novels show communal riots with historical perspectives. The history builds the frames of India with its enormous varieties figures a lot in Mistry’s fiction. Having lived in Canada since 1975, Mistry preserves the memory of his early days in India alive. In an interview with Veena Gokhale, he tells her how he has kept the memory of India alive and vivid enough to work in the minute details that his novels contain in abundance:
In general, I don’t think there is much one can do to keep memory alive—memory lives and dies on its own, memory is a strange thing: when assumed to be dead, it can surprise one by returning to life. I am speaking, of course, not of memory that is concerned with things like street, names, film, songs, etc. These things can be found in maps and books. I refer to those moments which, at the time of actual occurrence, may have seemed banal, but which given the gift of remembrance, because moments of revelation. My novels as not ‘researched’ in the formal sense of the word. A newspaper, Magazines, chats with visitors from India, chats with people on my infrequent visit to India these are the things I rely on. Having said that, I will add that all these would be worthless without the two imagination.\[1\]

Mistry prefers to write about India, which engages his imagination. While living in Canada and writing about India, Mistry is fully aware of several drawbacks of India’s social and political life, as they are discernible in his novels. A Fine Balance opens with a chapter entitled ‘Prologue 1975’ and ends with ‘Epilogue 1984’, set in Indira Gandhi’s India and written with compassion, humor and insight. It is a vivid, richly textured and powerful novel. The novel has sixteen chapters spanning the lives of three main characters over a period of ten years.

The ‘Fine Balance’ of the title of the novel is struck by opening the book with the stoppage of the suburban train service because of suicide by an unidentified character and closing the book with a similar stoppage of train service due to a suicide by
one of the main young aspiring character whose dreams of India are shattered so badly that he decides to commit suicide.

The novel is also the story of the heroic struggle of Dina Dalal and her two tailors to service a world of segregation, oppression and corruption in which honest work is denied and punished by a totalitarian system. Ishvar and Omprakash, the uncle and nephew have come to city by the sea (metropolis) primarily.

The most horrifying acts of the Emergency and its repercussions are left by the main protagonists. Ishvar and Omprakash the two characters from the lowest starata of the Indian caste system-chammars, have tried hard to move up the social ladder to that of a tailor. But their life is fraught with peril and they have to leave the village, where their family is burnt alive, in search of a better life, first to the town and then to the metropolis. In the big city, Ishvar and Om have to live under ghastly conditions. They are rounded up and taken away from their slum dwelling in the city to a labour camp by the city Embellishment programme.

How social conditions affect the middle class and the marginalized community is highlighted in a realistic manner in the novel. The lives of Dina Dalal, Ishvar Darji, Omprakash Darji and Maneck Kohlah, are interwoven, who try to overcome their hardles but fail to maintain A Fine Balance. It is a conscious effort to embrace more of the social reality of India.

Mistry portrayed these four major characters, very different from each other. Mistry’s decision to focus on the lives and the
painful past of these protagonists in itself indicates his prime concern, one of the caste and privilege. Dina the widow is the employer of the two tailors Om and Ishvar, uncle and nephew and a student Maneck Kohlah whom she takes in as a boarder from the foot hills of Himalayas are all too concerned with business of earning to survive. They make an attempt to help each other to survive through the adverse conditions of life in the underclass of Bombay. The narrative is woven around the separate stories of these four unlikely characters that are drawn together during the state of emergency. Along with these four we have a host of unforgettable community of characters. Mistry confesses to have begun this novel with the image of a woman sitting at a sewing machine and the consciously decided to set it during the ‘Emergency’. Mistry reveals that it was during the course of writing the novel that he got deeply involved with the lives of the characters. Dina Shroff a widow who refuses to remarry and her heroic struggle to earn just enough in order to survive the two tailors with positive hope of finding work in the city; a student to continue his education in a city school. The canvas is expanded with details of village life and the foothills of Himalayas; a subtle yet powerful development. The lives of the characters are weighed down by tragedy. The protagonists suffer every kind of misfortune and atrocity that may have been inflicted upon anyone during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency but what makes one wonder is the ability of the characters to endure.

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

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! .......His cheating! He doesn’t do any work! I do everything! (ABF, 19)

When Dina 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 her intellectually updated.

It is here that Dina 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 hurdles in the form of her brother. But wanting to live life on her own terms, she rebels against him and marries Rustoms. 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 order from the Au Revior Fashion House and begins to some 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 in her task. The two tailors come to her in the form of Ishvar and Omprakash Darji. They are chamars (leather markers) 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 reduce them to the status of handicapped beggars.

The novel makes a sharp indictment of the corrupt contemporary Indian society, blending it with a genuine sympathy for the poor and the underprivileged. Mistry amply succeeds in balancing a moving tragedy with his strong impulse towards the portrayal of political and social scenario. The novel takes into account the impact of Hindu fundamentalist agitation and the post-Babri Masjid riots on the life of ordinary people here.

*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 past independent India is forced upon. We find Mistry a little pessimistic in his approach. 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 seen is brought to the fore.

What does Mistry’s fiction deal with? This is started aptly by Pramod Nayar, who in the forward to his book, The Novels of Rohiton Mistry-A Critical Study by Jaydipsingh Dondiya states:

Mistry’s fiction is concerned with the great inequalities of the world: between the classes, genders, castes and official hierarchies.\(^2\)

* 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, Ishvar and Omprakash Darji, Maneck Kohlah and a number of insignificant characters 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 are not being able to do and ultimately so bow down to the forces of fate.
Impact of Communal Riots on the Characters:

This first theme introduces three of the four main characters: the tailors. Two of them, the uncle Ishvar and nephew Omprakash, have made their way from their village to the big city to earn money. They are members of the lowly Hindu caste relegated to the duties of cobblers. Disgusted by the treatment of his two sons by the members of more privileged castes and determined to give them opportunities beyond the dictates of the caste system, Ishvar’s father places his son in the care of his friend Ashrat, a Moslem tailor living in a nearby town. The boys become skilled tailor and seem to move up a rung on the ladder.

In *A Fine Balance*, the characters articulate the author’s concerns more vocally. Mistry is skeptical about the declaration of the emergency and centralizes the exclusions of the historiographers. The chronology of the narration makes it obvious. Even, the partition of the subcontinent seems remote, only occasional references are made about it. The author is more concerned with different incidents like, “murder, suicide, Naxalite terrorist, police-custody death.....” (AFB, 06) The boldness of Ishvar, his brother and their father anger towards the upper caste members in their village. On a visit home, Ishvar’s brother (Narayan) is murdered with the remainder of his family.

The light tore away the benevolent cloak of darkness.
The naked corpse’s face was a burnt and broken blur.
Only by the red birthmark on his chest could they recognize Narayan (AFB, 147)
Thakur Dharmsi the most horrifying act in a powerful upper caste village wants it to be like the old days, when there was respect and discipline and order in society. So Thakur Dharmsi orders his goondas to murder Narayan and his family for having the temerity to ask for a ballot.

The goondas began working their way towards the untouchable quarter. They beat up individuals at random in the street, stripped some women, raped others, burned a few huts. News of the rampage soon spread. People hid, waiting for the storm to blow over. (AFB, 146)

Ishvar and Omprakash the two characters from the lowest part of Indian caste system i.e. chamars and have tried hard to move up the social ladder to that of a tailor. But their life is fraught with peril and they have to leave the village, where their family is burnt alive, in search of a better life, first to the town and then to the metropolis.

Mistry attempts to give a voice to marginalized sections and raises relevant questions. The factious accounts of the predicament of the protagonists can be true. A whole arena of marginalized groups the Parsis, the chammars, the Muslims, the Madari caste, the beggars, share same novelistic space and produce history by establishing a community or a group identity. For them, as one of the characters in the novel utters,

Nothing changes. Years pass, and nothing changes. (AFB, 142)
A common man also expresses his view about the Emergency is nothing but “One more government tamasha”, (AFB, 05) those holding some influential post are happy, as

With the Emergency, everything is upside-down. Black can be made white, day turned into night. With the right influence and a little cash, sending people to jail is very easy. There’s even a new law called MISA to simplify the whole procedure. (AFB, 299)

In *A Fine Balance* Mistry uses a very descriptive, no-holds-barred approach and does not overlook any of the unpalatable atrocities of the Emergency. His realistic viewpoint and writing style shines through his portrait of the Emergency which was studded with forced sterilizations and vasectomies brought home with sinister family planning clinics and distribution of radio transistors, the city Embellishment programmer.

In the big city, Ishvar and Om have to live under ghastly conditions. They are rounded up and taken away from their slum dwelling in the city to a labour camp by the city Embellishment programme. The scene reminds one of the way ranchers round-up cattle. This is not where their misfortune and torture ends. Ishvar spoke timidly to the doctor.

Doctorji, you are like mother-father to us poor people, your good work keeps us healthy. Doctorji, please do the operation on me, I will be grateful, but please leave out my nephew, Doctorji, his name is Omprakash and his wedding is happening soon, please listen to me, Doctorji, I beg of you!(AFB,534)
Ishvar and Omprakash are forcibly picked up from the town square to fulfill the daily quota of sterilizations. Ishvar appealed and behaved with more dignity. But no one took notice of Ishvar’s crying. Grief and tears were general throughout the tents. As the novel progresses and the lives intertwined, the promise of this supposed opportunity is broken in horrific ways. Ishvar and Omprakash cannot escape the constraints of their caste. The operations are done in less than sanitary conditions;

The poison in the blood is too strong. The legs will have to be removed in order to keep the poison from spreading upwards. It’s the only way to save his life. (AFB, 542)

Ishvar’s leg then becomes affected with gangrene and both his limbs have to be amputated.

Much has been written about the Partition of India of 1947, as well as the Special Emergency of 1975-1977; and suspension of civil liberties. Mistry’s fictional work stands out, for its unique history from below which depends on the situation through the perspective of the poor. It was also looked upon as a necessary and equitable force, which was required to fix the problem of the post-colonial Indian state, which had been a constitutional experiment since the demise and departure of the British Empire.

In fact, the depiction the struggles of the four main protagonists and numerous socio economically challenged characters during the Emergency.
The condition of the common man, especially those who choose to oppose this anti-democratic period was a very pathetic one:

The Emergency rule was one of the darkest chapters of Indian history and nothing that happened during the British rule is comparable to the large-scale sterilisations of the poorest and the helpness, their sufferings, and the tortures of political prisoners... the yet unhold story of the political prisoners does not diminish its magnitude.¹

*A Fine Balance* is thus anchored in the post-independent India and more specifically in the days of Indira Gandhi’s rule with Dina Dalal and other characters, who suffer a lot because of political disturbances around them. Rohinton Mistry also uses the flashback technique to co-ordinate different events scattered here and there in this epic novel. Most of the events in the novel revolve around a predicament of a layman. K. Ratna Shiela Mani says:

Mistry narrates the story in a masterly fashion and the reader is shuffled between various time phases that mark each major historical upheaval. He highlights crucial events in the country’s chronicle by depicting the background of each of the major characters. Ishvar and his nephew Om are from the village; Maneck is from a hill station in the north, while Dina lives in the metropolis. The lives of the tailors’ forefathers reflect the tyranny of the caste system in rural India where unimaginable horrors are perpetrated on the lower castes. Oppressive caste violence has driven Om Prakash and Ishvar from their traditional occupation of working with leather to learn the skills of tailoring.
in the town. However, dwindling avenues of work in the town bring them to the metropolis. Maneck comes to the city for higher education. In Maneck’s background also lies the pathetic story of India’s partition. Dina’s story is one of struggle-struggle to safeguard her fragile independence from her autocratic brother Nussawan; and protect her flat from her rapacious landlord. Her story is symbolic of the rebellion of the young women against their subjection. Each member of this quartet aspires in a changing society to transcend the constraints of birth, caste, sex in a modern, urban world where anything seems possible.4

As Mistry describes it, the gaze was everywhere now. Everyone was suspected, everyone had to be investigated and the poor rendered homeless.

In the sub-plots of A Fine Balance Mistry has created the stories of a Beggarmaster and Rajaram, the hair-collector, who turn out to be Balababa at the end of the novel. In the story of Beggarmaster, as the name itself suggests is the chief of beggars and Shankar’s brother. He is a very influential person who protects Dina Dalal when her landlord plans the strategy for eviction. The moment Beggar master undertakes the responsibility to protect Dina Dalal, Ibrahim, the rent-collector and the hired goondas of the landlord do not turn up for the purpose of eviction.

Strangely enough Beggarmaster comes to know that Shankar is his brother. Ishvar and Om and even sometimes Maneck Kohlah used to meet Shankar, the beggar, regularly at Vishram Hotel. But
Ishvar and Omprakash are in their village for Omprakash’s marriage when Shankar dies. So they couldn’t attend his funeral.

Both Dina Dalal and Maneck Kohlah oblige Beggarmaster by attending Shankar’s funeral. A mild tone of satire goes with it. It has the under-current of pathos. Mistry narrates the funeral of Shankar:

The assembly of crippled, blinded armless, legless, diseased, and faceless individuals on the pavement soon attracted an audience. Onlookers inquired whether some hospital, for lack of space, was conducting an outdoor clinic. (AFB, 503)

Beggarmaster hired four men from the railway station to carry the bier. Even Beggarmaster was prepared to shoulder his dear brother Shankar from some distance, to honour him, but other beggars were not strong enough to the job. Beggatmaster made every possible effort to give a very lavish farewell to his brother for which beggars are not generally destined. Beggarmaster is murdered. Dina Dalal has much respect for him. The sub-plot revolving around Beggarmaster is really interesting and appealing.

Another sub-plot that A Fine Balance contains in it, is based on the stroy of Rajaram, the hair collector, who happens to be the neighbor of Ishvar and Omprakash earlier. He cannot earn enough money by way of sale of hair. He goes to the extent of killing. He goes to the extent of murdering Beggarmaster’s two beggars with very beautiful and long hair for the purpose. Sometimes Ishvar and Omprakash help him to preserve the bag of hair with them.
Soon Rajaram becomes a motivator for family planning, which destroyes the lives of many innocent people like Om and Ishvar. At last he renounces the world and becomes Bal-Baba a sanyasi. He says to Ishvar and Omprakash:

I will go with bare feet, my soles and heels cracked, torn, bleeding from a dozen lesion and lacerations to which shall be applied no salve or ointment. Snakes wandering across my path in dark jungles will not frighten me. Stary dogs will nip at my ankles as I roam through strange towns and remote villages. I will beg for my food. Children, and sometimes even adults, will mock me and throw stones at me, scared of my strangle countenance and my frenzied inward-gazing eyes. I will go hungry and naked when necessary. I will stumble across rocky plains and down steep hills. I will never complain. (AFB, 485)

Bal Baba’s role in *A Fine Balance* signifies Indian’s faith in so called and spiritual persons. No wonder, that they have a criminal history behind them. One of the voices through which Rohinton Mistry expresses his views about life is easily seen to be that of Valmiki, the proof reader. Rohinton Mistry has created a range of interesting character to suit the main and the sub-plots of the novel *A Fine Balance*. The sub-plots have been so well structured and woven to the main plot of the novel that the reader’s concentration is not disturbed at all while reading it.

*A Fine Balance* is a microcosm of life in general and political disturbances, which he keenly perceived around him when he was in India. He portrays the realities and horrifying implications of the anarchy and exploitation that could go on in the
name of discipline, beautification and progress in a democratic country. Mistry’s expatriate experiences make him think of his own native land from different angles. As a creative writer his expatriate experiences lead him to compare India and Canada. He finds something very peculiar about his native land when it is compared with a multi-cultural nation like Canada. This is how the history of India happens to be the basis of the story in *A Fine Balance*.

Rohinton Mistry has portrayed a galaxy of characters efficiently and elegantly. By portraying a cross section of Indian society especially those who are called riff-raff, the writer draws the real picture of India. There are four protagonists Dina Dalal, Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck Kohlah in this novel. The other leading characters are Beggarmaster, Rajaram, the hair-collector (Bal Baba), Thakur, Dharamsi, Vasantrao Valmki, Ibrahim the rent-collector, Shankar the beggar, Ashraf Chacha, Mumtaz Chachi, Dukhi Mochi, his wife Rupa, Mrs. Gupta, Narayan, Radha, Rustom, Nussawan, Ruby, Monkey Man, Jeevan, the tailor and others.

Rohinton Mistry has drawn the character of Dina Dalal quite artistically. She is not a woman like Dilnavaz or her daughter Roshan. She is the woman who needs absolute freedom, after her father’s death. She has to accept her brother Nussawan as her guardian but not at the cost of her individual freedom. She does not choose any boy out of several boys, suggested by her brother. On the contrary to this, she marries Rustom, the man of her choice.
She has to face hard times when her husband dies in an accident. Even then she does not wish to lose her pride and independence. So she does not come to her brother’s house but continues to stay in her husband’s flat independently. She supports herself by obtaining some orders for tailoring clothes. For several years, she struggles a lot. Then she again comes to her brother Nussawan’s house. At this stage the feminist may argue that by creating the event of Dina Dalal’s coming back of her brother’s house, Mistry does some injustice to her. It shows that it is difficult for a woman to live independently without any sort of male-protection. Even Beggarmaster’s protection helped her to live safely for more years.

But here the fact is that Dina Dalal, like other three protagonists, is disturbed considerably because of the prevailing political situation that is emergency. That is why she loses her freedom.

Mistry has portrayed Nussawan’s character satirically. He is an autocratic figure who thinks that nothing should be undertaken against his wish. He is not at all happy when Dina falls in love with Rustom Dalal and marries him. He fails to understand why his sister so acutely longs for absolute freedom. He manifests in himself all the smugness and hypocrisy of a cunning businessman.

The emergency adversely affects most of the characters in the novel. Avinash is also one of the victims of the Emergency Rule. His parents are not rich enough to offer dowry to his three sisters, who are ultimately forced to commit suicide. Mistry has created Vansantrao Valmiki’s character to explain the significance
of the title, *A Fine Balance*. His words in the novel are quite meaningful. He says:

There is always hope—hope enough to balance our despair. Or we would be lost. (AFB, 563) After all, our lives are but a sequence of accidents a clanking chain of chance events. A string of choices, casual or deliberate, which add up to that one big calamity we call life. (AFB, 564)

Rohinton Mistry has portrayed some minor characters in *A Fine Balance* with a purpose. His main objective for creating such characters is specially designed for highlighting moral dimensions.

The Monkey Man like Bal Baba is another interesting character. He performs jugglery acts first with monkeys and later with his sister’s two children who are taken away from him by Beggarmaster. The Monkey Man becomes revengeful and murders Beggarmaster. At this stage Ibrahim, the rent-collector; says to Dina:

He who had lived by the beggings of helpless cripples died by those beggings, rooted by their heaviness. You see, sister, once in a while there is a tiny piece of justice in the universe. (AFB, 556)

**Politics and Communal Riots:**

Rohinton Mistry also deals with the social and political situation of India during his stay in Bombay. Reader realizes that his knowledge of Indian politics is immense though he left India many years ago. The depiction of Shiva Sena, political schemes,
corruption and the sufferings of the middle-class dominate his novel.

The novel depicts the Indian life with its entire historical, sociological and political ambience. The achievement is all the more remarkable for a writer of the Indian Diaspora. Though here we come to know about the Civil Disobedience movement, Communal riots, Partition, language riots etc. The novelist himself during the course of his narration provides us with the sociological background the rigidity of the caste system, leading to the excesses committed especially by ‘Thakurs’ on the ‘Chamaras.’

Mistry uses upper-middle class characters like Nusswan, Dina’s businessman brother, Mrs. Gupta and Thakur Dharamsi to show the effects of this logic, which wasn’t uniquely held by the government, but supported by intellectuals and the middle classes as well. The first discussion of the emergency starts off in the book with this:

Dinabai, what is this Emergency we here about? Government problems-games played by people in power. It doesn’t affect ordinary people like us. (AFB, 75)

This shows that the common man was alienated from the working of the democracy and did not really associate himself with the various instruments that the government used. The poor rather wanted to stay away from it and hoped or may be believed that he would remain unharmed. Mistry is ingenious in bringing up this
quaint notion, that democracy was a luxury, reserved only for the elites.

Mistry takes a serious note of the gap between the passing and application of laws. The speeches made during the parliamentary elections are crammed with promises of every shape and size.

Promises of new schools, clean water, and health care; promises of land for landless peasants, through redistribution and stricter enforcement of the Land Ceiling Act; promises of powerful laws to punish and discrimination against, and harassment of background castes by upper castes; promises to abolish bonded labour, child labour, sati, dowry system, child marriage.(AFB,143)

However, these hollow promises turned out to be nothing but campaigning antics assuring lively entertainment for the villagers.

Maneck is a sensitive and affectionate boy who loves the pristine mountains and the snow and the pure air of his home in the North, as much as his father does. The peace and purity of the place is marred by the forces of ‘development’ and the entry of multinationals speels disaster for the indigenous drink business of father. Mr. Kohlah’s increasing sense of loss colours his relationship with his son who becomes increasingly alienated from his father. Unable to endure the ‘ragging’ by the senior students at the hostel, Maneck becomes Dina’s lodger. Maneck’s glancing through old newspaper after his return makes him feel the same:
After a while even the pictures looked the same. Train derailment, monsoon floods, bridge collapse; ministers being garlanded, ministers making speeches, ministers visiting areas of natural and man-made disasters. (AFB, 593)

Mistry has concentrated on the pessimistic image of his mother-land and mentions the atrocities committed on the untouchables during Emergency. The chamaars spent their life in obedient compliance with the traditions of the caste system and survived with humiliation and for bearance as their constant companions. Buddhu’s wife refused to go to the field with the Zamindar’s son, so they shaved off her head and walked her naked through the square and Dukhi’s wife was raped in the orchard. They were helpless victims and their crimes were varied and imaginative; a Bhungi had dared to let his unclean eyes meet Brahmin’s eyes; chamar had walked on the wrong side of the temple road and defiled it; another had strayed near a puja that was in progress and allowed his undeserving ears to overhear the sacred shlokas. When Dukhi became the father of two sons, he feared for his family’s safety and as a precaution, he went out of the way to be obsequious. The children of the low castes were denied the right to education; Ishvar and Narayan were caned severely when they entered the classroom. When Narayan wanted to assert his right to vote, he and his companions were hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree and the Thakur’s men:

Urinated on the three inverted faces. Semiconscious, the parched mouths were grateful for the moisture, licking the trickle with feeble urgency...burning coals
were held to the three men’s genitals, then stuffed into their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village until their lips and tongues melted away. (AFB, 146)

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

You changed from chammar to tailor. Be satisfied with that. (AFB, 143)

However Narayan who is educated wants to exercise his rights. He wants to actually vote in the elections and not let the “bank ballots filled in by the landlord’s men” (AFB, 144) Mistry in succinct prose shows the cynical manipulation of elections in rural India:

On Election Day the eligible voters in the village lined up outside the polling station. As usual, Thakur Dharamsi took charge of the voting process. His system, with the support of the other landlords, had been working flawlessly for years. The election officer was presented with gifts and led away to enjoy the day with
food and drink. The door opened and the voters filled through. They placed their thumbprints on the register to say they had voted, and departed.

Then the blank ballots were filled in by the landlords’ men. The election officer returned at closing time to supervise the removal of ballot boxes to the Counting station, and to testify that voting had proceeded in a fair and democratic manner. (AFB, 144)

Elections are master-minded by the landlords like Thakur Dharmsi. Narayan’s attempt at voting to make his mark himself results in the raid of his family by being burnt alive by the goondas of Thakur Dharamsi. The police find ‘nothing’ to support charges of arson and murder. So no F.I.R. could be registered. In fact the police is at the mercy of ‘daakoos’ like Dharamsi. Voters are bribed to ensure victory in the elections. One learns about a candidate who loses the elections in spite of giving away five thousand shirts and dhotis to the voters as these were not of a standard quality.

After the death of Narayan and his two nameless supporters, there is worse to come. The landlords’ men rampage through the village. They carry Narayan’s mutilated body to his house and display it to his wife. They then tie up Narayan’s wife, his little daughters and his parents and set fire to the hut. Their bodies were displayed in the village square and their entire family burnt alive. Om and Ishvar are safe in town and are the only survivors of their family. The writer focuses on man’s inhumanity to man and on the
deprivation, inequities and injustice faced by the underprivileged in India.

It is said that the hospitals follow standing orders to put down the cause of any death during Emergency as “accidental”. As such, Ashraf Chacha’s death at the market square by severe beating at the hands of the police is described as accident. The new rules of Emergency make it obligatory for every officer to encourage people to get sterilized to complete his quota; otherwise, there will be no promotion. Thus Family planning programmer is pressed into service to eliminate one’s enemies by confusing sterilization with castration. Mistry enables the readers to have an inside view of the Indian politics where a struggle for power is on. It is a nation torn by internal dissensions. Here, power hungry politicians control the strings of administration like puppeteer. Corruption, injustice, discrimination, caste exploitation, bloodshed, linguistic strife and communal disharmony ruled the roots during the period. The novel focuses on the Indian polity’s struggle for power, with the nation torn by internal dissent with power-hungry politicians controlling the string of administration. Mistry depicts this post-independent India where caste, class, ignorance, poverty discrimination and above all, the common man were exploited by self-serving leaders whose only objective was to enhance their own power and wealth with utter insensitivity to those around them.

The Role of Local Parties andPoliticians:

One of the consequences of living in the slum quarter is that these people are easy targets for political parties seeking crowds to
attend political rallies. Om and Ishvar are made to attend such a rally. The precise description of the political rally and the behavior of the politicians leave no doubt as to the identity of the politician being described during this rally.

In *A Fine Balance*, law is the chief instrument of political oppression. It is one of the occasions that serve, once again, to show that description even when it is seemingly neutral and objective can be a weapon for incisive political commentary. The absolute alienation of the forced audience from the political discourse is made clear before the rally by the deliberately ironic comments of the slum dwellers to the party workers when invited to attend the rally:

Tell her how happy we are! Why do we need to come?...Ask your men with the cameras to pull some photos of our lovely houses, our healthy children! Show that to the Prime Minister. (AFB, 258)

In addition, descriptions of the activities of the audience during the political speeches show their utter lack of relevance to the concerns of the slum dwellers. Unknown to Om and Ishvar, the twenty point programme will have direct impact upon their lives. Through this the Prime Minister expresses the wish to provide houses for the poorest, control population growth and eliminate poverty from cities, towns and villages.

For Ishvar and Om, the huge cut-outs of the prime Minister with inspiring slogans for hard work and sincerity are mere markers in the confusing labyrinth of the city streets.
The final and fatal blow to their lives is an unwarranted police raid on the market place. Ishvar and Om are forcibly taken to a sterilization camp of the village:

The Family planning centre was promoting its sterilization camp from a booth in the square, its loudspeakers at full blast. Banners were strung across the road, exhorting participation in the Nussbandhi Mela.... Not far from the birth-control booth was a man selling potions for the treatment of impotency and infertility. (AFB, 524)

People like Thakur Dharamsi thrives the auctioning patients who come to clinics, for unless Government employee produces two or three cases of sterilization; his salary for the month is held back. Provoked by Om’s act of vendetta, the Thakur, the villain of their family rain, orders another operation on the already sterilized Om. The Thakur has a special interest in the boy who is suffering from the testicular tumour, say the nurses. Ishvar’s hope of getting a reverse operation done gets sterilized:

What kind of life, what kind of country is this? Where we cannot come and go as we please? (AFB, 540)

Ishvar’s feet wounded at the beautification project develop gangrene and his legs are amputated. They return to ‘our city’ with a little trolley fitted with small wheels for Ishvar and a rope for Om to pull it.

By the closing stages of the novel, no veil of ivory is drawn over authorial manipulation. Shankar the beggar, known as ‘worm’ is the most pathetic of all Mistry’s creations. With no legs and
deformed arms, he pushes himself around on a wheeled platform like the one on which Ishvar will end his days. He is given ‘protection’ and guaranteed his pitch by the Beggar master, who takes a share of the offering made to him and who turns out to be his half-brother. Shankar keeps, for comfort, some tails of human hair; absurdly, he is accused of the murder of their original owners. Escaping from an angry crowd, he is crushed by a bus. His grotesque funeral procession is attacked by riot police, who believe the participants to be politically inspired mummers “indulging in street theatre” and the corpse to be a “symbolic dummy”. India is surely a country where beggars abound. Beggar master in the novel, is a very influential man. He controls the professional beggars and also protects Dina Dalal from the rent collector.

All four main characters are aware of their lives as well as their struggle for survival. The battle Dukhi started against caste determinism three generations ago is lost. Om is castrated; Ishvar’s leg has to be amputated because of the gangrene caused by the unsanitary operation, he is forced to undergo.

Mistry rounds off the narrative with an epilogue, set in 1984, eight years after the events narrated in the novel. Maneck who has spent all of that time in Dubai, in the Gulf, returns to India to be confronted by the riots that have broken out after the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, by her own Sikh security guards. It was due to the issue of the storming of the Golden Temple, Sikhs’ holy shrine in Amritsar by the Indian army under the orders of Mrs. Gandhi who wanted the Sikh separatists hiding there to be flushed out.
Although she does not actually pay for the crimes committed during the Emergency, she is still penalized for high-handedness and political excesses.

The author implies the various levels of existence. There is a see-saw struggle between happiness and despair. Life never seems to follow a placid course in Rohinton Mistry’s novel, *A Fine Balance*. There are always up-heavals, whether at the slums where Ishvar and Om Prakash reside in Bombay and problems of food and political disturbances.

The political-historical dimension of the novel is also obvious. The novel is a saga that spans the momentous events of India’s history from the turbulent times of the country’s partition. Mistry succeeds in interweaving national history with the personal lives of the protagonists.

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

The novel stands as a scathing attack on the degeneration of political morals, agonizing over the insensitivity of the ruling classes and coming down heavily on the subversion of institutions. *A Fine Balance* can be read as an expression of the predicament of the self in the Indian urban/rural context. In spite of its stark
realism, the novel reveals an underlying moral purpose and a positive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns. However, Mistry’s perception of and reaction to the dark periods of Indian history are clearly stated. Mistry manifests his moral views for the most part in the actions and contours of his characters and in little cues along the way. This is an intensely angry book, a political novel that pulls no punches. Mistry loathes the Congress Party, which has held power of India.

Rohinton Mistry uses memory and imagination to depict a turbulent period in Indian history. *A Fine Balance* is weighed down by glorious details of the horrors of internal Emergency. All the repercussions and disasters of those totalitarian years like the Kanpur sister’s suicide, castrations, demolitions and sterilizations frequently reappear in this book.

Mistry is well aware of the political changes in India. As a sensitive novelist. He tries to highlight the reasons for this change. The social tensions in the villages, the changing aspirations of the lower castes and caste-based violence’s, are so well delineated, so well woven into the flow of the narrative that it makes Rohinton Mistry a very astute political novelist. M.K. Naik in his learned article “The Political Novel in Indian Writing in English” defines this genre as a novel which either has a strong ideological learning or one which depicts political events. So by traditional definitions, political novel explains how politics works in particular societies.

The madness of communal riots has surfaced again and again in post-independence India. Beyond the causes of riots, the
politics of rioting demands a reassessment of the politics of identity within multicultural, secular India. Through 1990, the issue of communal riots has become more and more of a national pre-occupation and it is inevitable within the chronological movement of Mistry’s Pan-Indian tapestry that he turns to the post 1990s communal riots.

**Women and Communal Riots:-**

In the novel, *A Fine Balance* the portrayal of women in their marginalized roles commands the reader’s attention. In fact, the conflict in the novel revolves around Dina Dalal, twice marginalized as a woman and a Parsi. Dina is a powerless woman striving to break-free of the shackles imposed on them by patriarchal society. She succeeds for a while but in the end meets tragic fates which only diminish in comparison to the fates of the Dalit characters. Dina belongs to a Parsi family in Bombay respectively. Women are the means through which cultural transmission takes place in a society. Indian society is deeply patriarchal which endorses male domination and female subjugation. Religion, which is patriarchal in nature, restrains women and forces them to accept a subordinate position. Through a study of her character, we get to know the place of women in Parsi culture and in her struggle we see a woman’s fight for her rightful place in the world at large. In living a life of her choice, she has to wage a lone battle for her personal as well economic independence. Hers is a small, subdued voice but heard strong to free herself of the shackles of male supremacy. Her life shows
women in general and Parsi women in particular have a long way to go to proclaim them ‘independent’. Dina struggles to defend her fragile independence from an autocratic brother as well as to protect herself from rapacious landlords. Hers is a life symbolic of a woman’s rebellion within patriarchy and religious taboos.

The Right to Life and Personal liberty is the most fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution. This takes within its sweep every opportunity necessary to develop one’s personality and potentiality to the highest level possible in the existing stage of our civilization.

In the light of such assumption, it can be concluded that Mrs. Shroff played the role of perfect wife, whose disintegration after the death of her husband is considered as appropriate and ‘natural’. Mrs. Shroff remains the faithful wife. She had adhered to the role model of perfect widow endorsed by the patriarchal society.

While she was busy herself playing the role of obedient wife, when her husband was alive, she subconsciously becomes an instrument in the position of patriarchal strictures on Dina. She renounces her right to make decisions for her daughter and lets Nusswan take on the position of the head of the family. Although aware that the sale of her husband’s practice would comfortably take care of them, she, against her good sense, let Nusswan run the household and heartily endorsed Nusswan’s decision to dismiss the maid. She defines the task of performing their own chores as similar to ‘going campaign’. Mrs. Shroff is quite aware of the burden that befell Dina on the dismissal of the maid. Dina’s
constant complaints about Nusswan’s unfair treatment and her angry arguments with her brother only evoke responses such as;

You mustn’t speak like that to your big brother from Mrs. Shroff. (AFB, 19)

In A Fine Balance, Dina’s mother represents the first generation woman. Dina’s mother lives a life of sacrifice and no fun. Her husband being an idealist does not charge from poor patients and the family income just enough to support minium of luxuries. The family’s friends and relatives had the utmost sympathy for Dina’s mother.

Poor Mrs. Shroff. Never a vacation, never a party no fun at all in her existence. (AFB, 15)

Mrs. Shroff’s relationship with her husband is not discussed in great detail in the novel but her life after the demise of her husband shows her attitude. Dina’s mother let Rustom dictate the terms and crown himself as the decision-maker of the family. It is unclear from the novel whether she favoured her son more than her daughter, but there is clear evidence to show that she had consciously allowed Nusswan to take charge of Dina’s upbringing. Mrs. Shroff gradually loses interest in life after the death of her husband.

Nusswan preferred to regard his mother’s disintegration as a widow’s proper renunciation, wherein she was sloughing off the dross of life to concentrate on spiritual matters. (AFB, 20)
When Mrs. Shroff mediates in the fights between Dina and her brother, she usually ends up taking the side of her son. In spite of witnessing the impediment the housework is to Dina’s academics, Mrs. Shroff is unable to stick by her decision to face Nusswan and Press for an ayah to be employed.

Mrs. Shroff does not intervene in the fights between her son and her daughter which almost ends up in the physical abuse of her daughter. Mrs. Shroff could easily have put an end to these episodes of physical violence perpetrated on Dina.

Dina gets obsessed with the idea of personal freedom because of the misery suffered under her brother’s guardianship typical of the Parsi tradition. It is clear in the prologue of *A Fine Balance*, that Dina holds independence in high esteem. Talking about her tailoring business, which eventually sanctions her economic freedom she says:

No need to now to visit her brother and beg for next month’s rent. She took a deep breath once again, her fragile independence was preserved. (AFB, 11)

For Dina, having to rely on Nusswan’s money means losing her freedom; giving into her brother’s rule equal giving up her independence. Therefore, her small tailoring business is not at least of all an attempt to escape the sphere of her brother’s influence. Dina relies on male career patterns of entrepreneurship in order to leave behind a male sphere that prevents her from coming into her own as a modern woman.
In an act of rebellion against Nusswan’s manipulative power, the young Dina falls in love with Rustom Dalal, a compounder, and marries him against the wishes of her class conscious brother. Unfortunately, her happy married life with Rustom comes on the day of their wedding anniversary. Despite her brother’s genuine offer of help, she decides to live by herself. Nusswan cannot understand her “strange idea of independence” working like a slave to earn a pity even as a widow.

Her life as a widow is harsh and filled with an endless struggle to survive in a set-up where single woman has to struggle twice as hard to lead a life with dignity. Initially, with class-conscious Dina playing it strict and exploitative of the tailors, relations among the four are tense and guarded; the tailors on their part too are suspicious of her while Maneck, the paying guest, is divided in his allegiances. Gradually with Om and Ishvar, her struggle for independence becomes a struggle for control. She decides to maintain her distance in order not to lose control. Dina is compelled by her landlord to vacate the premises on legal grounds that she is illegally carrying on the business and accommodating the tailors and the student as guest. Ultimately, left alone to carry on the burden of her life, she now is forced to take refuge at her brother Nusswan’s, much against her will. Mistry’s comment:

Independence came at a high price; a debt with a payment schedule of hurt and regret. But the other option under Nusswan’s thumb was inconceivable. (AFB, 473)
Dina Dalal finally finds refuge with her brother. Her story is the Indian woman’s yearning for the almost impossible independence. Facing a life of misfortunes with dignity, refusing to give into debilitating memories, the female protagonist Dina finally leads a balance between hope and despair.

In contrast, the life of the minor women characters belonging to pre-independent India in the novel is very pathetic. Rohinton Mistry presents a very realistic and dehumanizing portrayal of various forms of torture that the women of lower castes are subjected to in spite of any number of rights that free India sanctioned to women. Despite new laws of untouchability passed by the government, nothing has changed. Exploitation of the low castes by upper castes continues unabated. The human history bears witness to the occurrence of violence against women on account of sex discrimination. Of all the violence’s against women, rape is one of the most violent. Rape as a violation with violence, of the private persons of women, is an outrage by all canons.

Rape in conflict is a weapon to terrorize and degrade a particular community often to achieve a specific political end. The rape of one person is translated into an assault upon the community as a whole through the emphasis placed in every culture on women’s sexual “virtue”. The shame of rape humiliates the family and all those associated with survivor.  

Women of low castes, including tribal women, are more prone to rape as in the case of Buddu’s wife or Roopa in the narrative. The refusal by low-caste Buddhu’s wife to go to the fields with the Zaminadar’s son results in the shaving of her head.
and being paraded naked through the square. In the same way Roopa, Dukhi’s wife, is raped by the watchman of the orchard, tells her own tale of helplessness again.

All these acts highlight the injustices done to women, interrogate the marginalization of women in the male dominated society and prove that inequality between the sexes is caused by the cultural construct of gender.

**Symbolism Used to Signify the theme of Communal Riots:**

The rent collector justifies the murder of Beggar master. Thakur Dharamsi is a political character in the novel. He is a symbol of tyranny, exploitation and injustice. People like him flourished a lot at the time of the Emergency. There is also an important character in Dina Dalal. The death of Dina’s father, Dr. Shroff by a cobra’s bite intensifies the theme of the novel. His death symbolizes the death of idealism. It becomes more painful when we are encountered with his son, Nusswan. After his death, Nusswan presides over the household, whose personality represents the antithesis to his father’s character. Whereas Dr. Shroffs actions are motivated by idealism and altruism, Nusswan has internalized a businessman’s pragmatism together with an obsession for power control. His sister, Dina, becomes the victim of his obsession for power and control. She has to discontinue her school as she is over burdened with the entire household work.
This is not all as far as Dina’s life is concerned. She becomes all the more tragic after the death of her husband, Rustom. Now her fears of dependence and of loneliness are anchored in this second traumatic experience i.e. the loss of her husband. Rustom’s death haunts Dina’s mind, and it seems that it cannot be compensated. His demise confronts Dina with isolation and loneliness, concomitant:

When the human weight did not materialize, she awakened to emptiness, relearning the loss in the darkness before sunrise. (AFB, 47)

Dina Shroff has two conflicting impulses, i.e. her fear of isolation and her misgivings about dependence. While both impulses pose a threat to the source of meaning in her life, fighting one necessarily favors the other.
Manju Kapur’s ‘Difficult Daughters’

This chapter analyzes Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is set during India’s Independence struggle and is partially based on the life of Kapur’s own mother Virmati. The novel is of the partition time and written absorbing intelligence and sympathy. The story is of a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education and illicit love. Virmati, a young woman born in Amritsar, falls in love with neighbour Professor and eventually marries him. Virmati find that the battle for her independence created irrevocable lines of communal riots and pain around her. The novel form offers a disguised critique of religions communalism.

**Life and Works of Manju Kapur (1948):**

Manju Kapur was born in 1948 in Amritsar. She is an Indian novelist. She is graduated from the Miranda House University College for women and went for M.A. at Dalhouse University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and an M.Phil at Delhi University. Manju Kapur lives in New Delhi, where she is a teacher of English literature at her Alma Mater Miranda, House College. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* received the commonwealth Award for the Eurasian region and went on to become a best seller in India. Manju Kapur speaks for the middle class and even has earned several comparisons with Jane Austen for her sharp eyed, finally turned character portraits who are caught in tricky situations.
Consequences of Communal Riots:

Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* is set against the backdrop of the Indian Nationalist Movement and Partition. The novel presents the realistic picture of the pre-partition era, the communal riots and the freedom. It is a powerful tale of three generations though the story’s central figure is Virmati. The novel also depicts the story of courageous lady who is beautifully portrayed by the novelist. Virmati, a strong headed and responsible girl born into a strict and socially up-graded family falls in love with a young married professor. It is the Professor’s quest for learning an aura of knowledge that fascinated Virmati initially, but gradually it takes the form of all full-fledged love relationship, as she gets to know him more as a man—the first one besides her father and brothers. Her struggle to attain an equal status with the professor’s unrefined yet the legitimate first wife in his household; to continue learning further, to reconcile with her angry family and her resolve to be a part of him wholly physically are some of the issues that make this woman a memorable character. Her subsequent discovery that these interests and desires are comparatively less important to her wish to be independent and be a person of her own that brings about roundness to her character. The novel opens up many issues concerning love, betrayal, woman hood and above all a woman’s struggle for independence Virmati realizes irrevocable lines of Partition and pain around her. Ida, who is the daughter of Virmati and the narrator of the novel, states in the beginnings:
The one thing I had wanted was not be like my mother. No Now she was gone and I stared at the fire. (DD, 01)

She gathers information about her mother from the relatives, who say,

What is past is past, don’t bother about it, have another paratha. (DD, 05)

Ida comes to know that her mother studied more than her other girl and suffered a lot in whole life. Ida is told about her grandmother, Kasturi that “she was always sick”. (DD, 04) The reasons for being sick all the time is very much clear by whole the remark of Kasturi’s sister-in-law.

Breeding like cats and dogs, Harvest lime again. (DD, 07)

Kasturi always feels tired, and her feet and legs ache all the time, Ida wants to know more and more about her mother.

There had been eleven of them. The girls: Virmati, Indumati Gunvati, Hemavati, Vidyavati and Parvati. The boys: Kailashnath, Gopinath, Krishnath, Prakashnath and Hiranath. (DD, 04)

Indumati is like second mother to her siblings. Kasturi has become very weak due to repeated childbirths. She has filled the houses as her in-laws have wanted, but she looks faint day by day. She expresses her helplessness to her aunt-in-law:

I am going to die, Maji, this time. I know it. Don’t talks such rubbish, beti, retorted the older woman sharply. (DD, 07)
Kasturi does not approve the dress of Shakuntala, Virmati’s glamorous cousin. According to Kasturi,

Study means developing the mind for the benefit of the family. (DD, 17)

Virmati wishes to follow ideals of Shakuntala who invites Virmati to move out of the house as times are changing. Virmati is full of admiration and love for Shkuntala, her elder cousin who reads in Lahore, Virmati thinks that a day will come when she will study in Lahore.

Virmati is constantly busy with her household duties. Her brothers and sisters are demanding something or the other all the time. Someone needs sugar and flour. The other one asks about the medicine. The girl complains that her book is taken by her sister, another sister is crying. There is a complaint that Gopi, her brother has not done his homework and so there is complaint from the school. She fails her F.A. Her mother makes a comparison between her and Shakuntala. Her mother thinks that Virmati had the kotha store room to study.

Virmati is not able to notice the people who admire her. She has a long face. She looks attractive at the age of seventeen. Lala Divan Chand, Virmati’s grandfather tells his sister, that he will pick a boy for Virmati from their Samaj.

His sister thinks that marriages are in the hands of God. (DD, 23)

Difficult Daughters is a story of a girl from a wealthy and distinguished family residing in Lahore before Independence who
comes and settles in Amritsar after Independence. Virmati’s mother Kasturi is educated too. Though Kasturi and other family members believe in value of education for girls, they also opine that girls must be married off at the completion of necessary education. Girls are not encouraged for higher studies and selecting a career or a life partner for themselves. However, Shakuntala, Virmati’s cousin, is M.Sc. in chemistry and works at Lahore College. She is strong-willed and career-oriented. She is self-assured and cherishes the idea of being something other than wife. In an intimate conversation, she tells Virmati:

Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but Women are still supposed to marry and nothing else. (DD, 17)

Shakuntala always inspires Virmati, the protagonist, to think above the vested interest and get involved and fight for social and national cause. She says:

Times are changing and woman are moving out of the house, so why not you. (DD, 16)

Virmati too often marvels at the ways of Shakuntala, her cousin and has all appreciation for her. Virmati comes to know that Shakuntala reads papers, attends seminars and travels with her friends. This reflects that the seeds for aspiration and emancipation are already lying there in the heart of the protagonist even much before she meets Harish, the professor. We find the novelist speaking the protagonist’s mind in the very ensuring paragraph:
It was useless looking for answers inside the home one had to look outside. To education, freedom and the bright lights of Lahore Colleges. (DD, 17)

The novel traces Virmati’s revolt against the family tradition. The reason for her desire to study is attributed to her cousin Shakuntala’s influence.

Manju Kapur’s novel, exploring the multi-dimensional relationship between mothers-daughters, the writer clearly imparts the message that unfulfilled mothers cannot offer fulfillment to their daughters. For a healthy nurturing relationship between the two, it is necessary for women to be enlightened as well as liberated. As Simon de Beauvoir rightly points out:

The mother’s relation with her children takes from within the totality of her life; it depends upon her relation with her husband, her past, her occupation, and herself. 6

These three generations of woman represent the attitudinal changes with the passage of time. Kasturi represents complete acceptance, Virmati represents adjustments and Ida represents complete non-adjustment. Kasturi completely belongs to the traditional times where woman employment is unheard totally; hence complete acceptance and subordination to men are expected from them. She has no complaints against her life or against her husband because she has no expectations.

Ida completely belongs to the recent times where the sight of highly educated and employed woman is very common. Virmati is in the transition phase, hence compromising and conflicting.
Impact of Communal Riots on the Characters:

The novel has a large number of characters. They are businessmen, educationists, political activists, as well as servants. They suffered a lot in the communal riots. Several male characters like Virmati’s father, grandfather, uncles, friends and above all her husband, Harish come from real, day to day life. There are a host of women characters in the novel. Virmati’s five sisters, her aunt, her cousins, mother-in-law and her friends at Lahore who suffered in partition.

Manju Kapur has successfully portrayed the conflict in her characters. The special is that her female characters are only involved in clash against male-dominated traditional world but they have also suffered this conflict in the form of generation gap. Kasturi, Virmati and Ida are three chief female characters, whose relationships are much affected with the ailment of generation gap that is another modified term for the clash of tradition versus modernity. Virmati, the protagonist is a ten year old girl and the eldest daughter of a Punjabi house hold, who, from the very inception unfolds a saga of revolt against deep rooted family tradition and later on succeeds to some extent. However, Virmati a difficult daughter of Kasturi becomes a mother of another difficult daughter called Ida who similarly revolts the traditions of her mother in a more aggressive and bold manner. This chain of clash weaves the major plot of the novel. Here, the observation of Mrs. P. Sudhashri deserves mention when she says:
Virmati, the protagonist rebels against tradition. Yet she is filled with self doubt. She pleads for studying further and postponement of her marriage. She attempts suicide, when faced with prospect of marrying the canal engineer. The family brands her ‘to be restless, sick and selfish and locks her up.’

In fact, Virmati after a number of vicissitudes ends up in her own marginalization by her traditional family and society. In a clime of freedom struggle of India, the seeds of modernity are sown in the heart of Virmati who decides to study further and to go Lahore.

The rest of the novel deals with the attempts of Virmati and the professor to prolong their love affair. It was a long drawn out one, carried on secretly for five long years. He insisted that she must join the college at Lahore. Her mother was particular that she should stay at an Arya Samaj hostel there. At Lahore, she carried on her clandestine relationship with Harish Chandra, the professor. Meantime, she had a forced abortion. After five years, they got married. She was dispossessed from her own house after the event.

Virmati had to suffer a lot at the hands of the mother in law and her co-wife. The former wife refused to yield to her the rights over her husband, except that of sleeping with him. She grew so fed up with her life at his home that she decided to take up the job of a school teacher.

Virmati’s father is killed in the riots. The next day his grand-father dies of a shock of his son’s death. When her father dies, she is not allowed to go near his dead body. When her grand-father
dies, Virmati refuses to accompany her husband. After these two deaths, she feels very lonely. The professor moves closer to her and this time she is pregnant. Unfortunately this time it is a miscarriage. She thinks that it is god’s punishment to him.

She goes to Lahore to complete her M.A. in philosophy. When she returns, she finds that the rest of the family has been sent to Kanpur due to communal riots in Amritsar. The couples enjoy the complete privacy. This time Virmati is pregnant. There is tense atmosphere around her. There was doctor to look after her. Ida is born. When Virmati suggests the name “Bharati”, the professor opposes it:

I don’t wish our daughter to be tainted with the birth of our country. What birth is this? With so much hatred? We haven’t been born” (DD, 276)

He suggests the name Ida, Virmati asks its meaning. The professor says:

It means a new slate, and a blank beginning. (DD, 277)

The professor’s possessive attitude is seen throughout the novel. He follows her everywhere. Be it Lahore or Nahan, he is quick in establishing physical contact with Virmati. Virmati thinks that a woman’s happiness lies in giving her husband happiness. Indian woman takes care of everybody in the family except themselves.

The novel evokes some concern over the problems of woman in a male dominated society where laws for
women are made by men in its social matrix and a husband stands as a ‘sheltering tree’ under which a woman proves her strength through her suffering.  

Physical suffering of Virmai is caused by the professor’s lack of understanding of psychological pressure on Virmati. He is not satisfied with Ganga, so he needs a companion for his intellectual needs. He is living in a male-dominated society which is not so much concerned about Virmati who wishes to establish her self-identity.

Ganga at first tries to protest, but her protest is weakened after few days. She was married to Harish in childhood. She is illiterate but she is faithful to her husband, a typical Hindu wife. She knows that Indian wives suffer and adjust themselves. She represents the middle-class-woman of those days. She feels isolated with the entry of Virmati. She knows she has to fight her own struggle. She is called “the meek servant of the professor” (Sumita, 138) by Sumita Pal. Her role in the professor’s life is shortened as soon as Virmati enters.

Manju Kapur’s novel is a story of a daughter’s journey back into her mother’s painful past. The daughter Ida does not want to be like her mother as she does not want her voice to be suppressed by anybody. She hates any such attempts which denies.

By March 1947, large scale killings start on a province. Different characters in the novel like Kailashnath, Gopinath, and Kanhiya Lal, relieve for Ida the hell that they underwent during those terrible months. India’s birth into a free nation proves to be a
difficult and bloody one. Gopinath describes the train coming from Pakistan filled with blood.

There was blood everywhere, dried and crusted, still oozing from the doorways, arms and legs hanging out, windows smashed. (DD, 268)

Kailashnath says old memories in the month of March,

I remember when it started. It was 5 March. Those Muslims were well prepared. They knew how to make bombs, explosives. They looted and burnt, drank our blood, destroyed our peace, and put the fire of revenge in our guts. They had always hated us, tried to poison the well once. (DD, 267)

The novel has a large number of characters. They have suffered a lot in communal riots. Kanhiya Lal also expresses:

I’m a doctor and I had never seen so much blood. It was horrible. I will never forget it as long as I live. (DD, 268)

Everywhere there is the smell of fear, distrust and hatred. Kapur brings out the psychological trauma that people underwent during those trying days. With a few lakhs dead, the dispossessed could not stop talking of all that they had lost -their houses, animals and furnishing. Ironically, in this period of unrest and the scourage of death which covered the entire city. Virmati finds the “space” and peace that she had been craving for.
Politics and Communal Riots:

The twentieth century was a period of tremendous up-heaval and change both in social organization and political which emerged out of it. While Europe saw the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the Great War the Great Depression and the violence of the Second World War, India was to face the struggle for Independence and the holocaust that followed in the wake of the Partition of the country in 1947. The turbulent days that preceded and followed the partition of British India were fraught with political hatred and violence, with passions which had seized people in a communal frenzy. In the words of Manohar Malgaonkar,

The entire land was being splattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred its roads gutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war.9

The novel seems to cross all barriers of time and place and recreate the unrest and upheaval of the first half of twentieth century India, in a way that makes it meaningful to the present troubled times. Kapur imposes on her fiction a shape which gives expression to her own view of a changing world.

In Lahore, through Virmati’s roommate Swarnalata, the major events are exposed preceding the partition of India in 1947 debating societies, meetings and politics of the Muslim League and Indian National Congress. Gandhian non-cooperation and communal tension was increasing during the forties. It is
Swarnalata who first makes Virmati realize that people have strong religious identities like,

Allah--o--Akbar,

Har, Har Mahadev,

Bolo So Nihal. (DD, 270)

People show their own religious and ethnic identity through their culture. Virmati finds Swarnalata committed and articulate. When Ida meets Swarnalata to find out more about her mother, the old lady relives,

the division that had ploughed furrows of blood through her generation. (DD, 124)

Virmati undergoes the trial and tribulations of a love that has little hope of social acceptance, self-doubt and the trauma of an abortion. In Virmati we find a woman caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and the yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. When Swarnalata shares her ideas about a Congress and Muslim League coalition and how she thought that they must together fight a common enemy, the British, Virmati thinks,

This is the life I should be involved in. Not useless love and a doubtful marriage. (DD, 122)

Kapur seems to be obsessed with the politics and pertaining to the Hindu-Muslim conflict and has responded to this issue in narrative of *Difficult Daughters* in a very innovative manner. She has incorporated Indian Arya Samaj movement, Freedom Struggle,
Partition and tabling the Hindu Code Bill in the parliament through *Difficult Daughters*. The politics of communal riots is relevant with regard to the theme of Hindu-Muslim feud.

The politics of partition of the Indian continent is incorporated symbolically and actually. It’s symbolic and is found in the division within Lala Diwan Chand family. His first son’s wife, Lajwanti, sows the seed of the family partition. Since she has got only two children, she becomes intolerant of her co-sister, Kasturi as she has got eleven children. She feels that there is inequality in enjoying the fortunes of the joint family. She coaxes her husband to demand for the Partition of the family.

Thus Chander Prakash discusses the matter of the family partition with his father who rejects his demand initially. He explains to him that there is not inequality in the utilization of wealth of the family as he sees to it that the need of all members of the family is fulfilled. Lajwanti does not become content with her father-in-law’s justification and thus induces her husband to pester upon his father for the family partition. Accordingly, Chandar Prakash meets his father in every week and tries to persuade his father to agree for the family partition. He explains that the next generation of their family may enter into feud if the problem of the property share is not settled now. Lala Diwan Chand loses his hold and approves the partition with melancholy thus:

Every weekend Lala Diwan Chand was faced by the elder son’s persistent harping on this theme. This house thing was beginning to be a nightmare….. He was deeply mortified at being manoeuvred in to this
position ….Ultimately he gave in. He could not bear to see Chander work self into such agonized states. If separation was inevitable, better to do it while he was alive than to have his sons bicker over property after he was dead. Bitterly he said to his son, “You realize your house will only be built after the first one has been completed.” And Lajwanti, who had been listening as usual, knew she had own. (DD, 29)

Consequently a new house is constructed at Lepel Griffin Road for the family of Suraj Prakash and his family with his wife, eleven children. His aunt is shifted to new house while the family of Chander Prakash stays behind in the old house. Thus the joint family of Lala Diwan Chand is divided. Yet Lajwanti keeps visiting her co-sister every now and then. It is a forecasting of the national politics in which the demand for a separate state for the Muslims called Pakistan has been already initiated by the Muslim leaders.

The conflict arises out of the demand for Partition, and is reflected in the feud in the friendship between Swarnalata and Ashrafi. They were very close friends when they were doing English Honours together in Lahore College for woman though they are Hindu and Muslim respectively. Swarnalata was nominated for the senior studentship at the time of student elections. Swarnalata was already identified as a nationalist trying to unite the forces of the Muslim League and the Congress to fight against the British.

Later, she noticed that her friend, Ashrafi, was standing against her. It was found out that the principle with inclination
Towards the British had coaxed Ashrafi’s religious identity was deeper than her friendship with her. It is a suggestion of the politics of partition at the national level. How Swarnalata and Ashraf were divided on the communal lines is depicted thus:

So many things are deeper than friendship. In this case it must have been religious identity, may be Muslim fear and insecurity. They must have told her she would be disloyal to the Muslim cause. I didn’t want to stand against Ashraf, but my group said we had to win this election if it was the last thing to we did. So you see, ultimately I too put something before friendship…. Anyway, for the first time our college was divided along communal lines. (DD, 135)

The theme of national politics is presented more in the episodes of Swarnalata. She has started giving her support to the nationalist movement against the British during her under graduation in her college, Lahore College for women. When she joins her M.A. course in RBSL College, Lahore, her participation in the movement becomes deeper. Lahore was the centre place of the national politics during those days with several activities going on simultaneously. It is presented in the narrative like this:

Winter in Lahore, and conferences take place fast and furious in the city. Important people arrive, inaugurate, them, make speeches, have their photographs printed in the newspapers, along with an account of what they said, and then move on. In one month alone there is the Anti-Pakistan conference, the Arya Bhasha Sammelen conference, the Urdu conference, the India History conference, the Punjab Azad Christian conference, the All India Sikh League.
The atmosphere is charged, and voices reverberate with self awareness. (DD, 139)

Some of the women characters like Sita Rallia, Noor Ahmed, Mary Singh, Mohini Datta and Mrs. Mehta along with Swarnalata are depicted as nationalists addressing the students and public to motivate them to strengthen the fight against the British through the public meetings frequently. Mohini Datta is the role model for Swarnalata in her political life.

The politics in Difficult Daughters deal with the conflict between Hindu and Muslim. While the politics of Partition of Pakistan is included in Difficult Daughters, the Muslims cause violent attack on the Hindus and Hindus are the victims of the communal disharmony. Swarnalata also participates in the national politics actively. But Astha the heroine associates herself with the contemporary politics in full spirit and fights tooth and nail against the culprits of communal violence.

**Women and Communal Riots:**

Manju Kapur’s novel, Difficult Daughters depicts many generations of women. The major theme that emerges is the lives of women during India’s struggle for independence. Kapur describes her protagonist Virmati as a ‘new woman’ who breaks many social norms to gain her selfhood. In all her novels traditional, transition and modernity are the stages through which the women are passing.
Difficult Daughters is Kapur’s tribute to the country’s celebration of 60 years of independence in which she makes the protagonist Virmati to fight against taboos, social and family restrictions and man made rules for women. Set against the backdrop of the struggle for independence, the novel highlights for issues like the awakening of the country for freedom, women’s education etc. Women characters in the novel are divided into three generations with their values, mindsets and relationship. The novel presents larger issues of patriarchy, which denies women’s voice and freedom set around at the time of partition. The novelist expresses her absorbing ideas of woman relationship, women sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage, gender roles and self discovery.

Manju Kapur’s novel focusing on aspects related to partition exposed the critical, differential dimension and the impact of partition on men and women. It represents the reality of the relation between gender and socio-historical processes, as Seema Malik writes:

History of woman may not necessarily be the same as the history of the men. The impact of cataclysmic event like partition on women was much different and more traumatic and enduring than men. The word partition is inadequate to encompass the myriad meanings this event has for women or to even approximate the many levels of experiences that they lived.\textsuperscript{10}

The life, women lived and struggled under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society was reflected in the writings of
women writers in the post colonial India. Manju Kapur has also knitted her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* with the same fabric as the backdrop and emerged as a significant novelist on the contemporary literary scene. The novel depicts the women’s struggle for their existence in the novel. The novel perfectly set around the times of independence and partition, clearly explains that the concept of modernity involves through partition. It relates the story of a young woman, Virmati, torn between filial responsibilities, desire for education and emancipation and her delinquent love towards a married professor of English named Harish. It portrays a woman’s need to be loved, to be needed, meaningfully by the mother, as a young daughter, in her parental family, in her youth, by a man and lastly in her married life.

The novelist has portrayed the protagonist as a woman caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day. Under the shade of a friend Swarnalata, Virmati attempts to analyze the communal tension involved during the Indian freedom struggle. As Gurpyari Jandial aptly writes:

> With Swarnalata, Virmati attends the Punjab Women student’s conference. Here she sees and hears Women who exude confidence and strength. She listen to them as they explain the meaning of the flag, the importance of freedom for the development of human spirit, impact of war, human right, strikes, academic freedom, rural upliftment, language etc.

Virmati in course of time finds herself to be inapt and inadequate and memories of the stolen moments she shared with
professor leaves her not concentrating on the issues being spoken about. Understanding her mind, Swarnalata makes an attempt to make her realize how she is wasting her life in mistrusted relationship. She says:

Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru, the war, and the Satyagraha movements because of all these things women are coming out of their houses taking jobs, fighting, and going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream. (DD, 139)

Virmati’s the reason for attitude mother is consequence of her mother’s tendency of ignoring her. At times Virmati yearns for affection; for some sign that she is special. Kasturi’s relation with Virmati does not let her realize her daughters need for a separate identity, an independent existence. So, Virmati has to rebel. She has to fight against the power of the mother as well as the oppressive forces of patriarchy symbolized by the mother figure. Difficult Daughters represents the turmoil of a woman who tries to overcome her cultural identity, and forge a self-identity an attempt which leaves a woman hard hearted and desolate. Virmati’s tragedy is the tragedy of ambition, obsession and un-acclaimed ovation.

Symbolism Used to Signify the theme of Communal Riots:

Kapur has studied the problems of Virmati as a Socialist feminist for her situation and her struggle for identity and self-expression, as well as feminism is both a concept and movement in the present century and is a new dimension to contemporary
thinking. She reflects the internal and external conflict of Virmati. This novel is not only about Difficult Daughters but also of difficult mothers. The word ‘difficult’ symbolizes the generation gap which continues to exist in post-colonial India. The oppressive mechanism of the society with deep autobiographical undertones makes the novel very realistic.

Many stayed on in Amritsar, desperately waiting for some news of those left behind or lost during the journey. With the irrevocable cries of pain and separation around her. Virmati too breaks away from her past. Keeping a few sets of clothes for herself, she sweeps everything out of the upbards and donates large bundles to the refugee camps. This gesture symbolically implies her ability to free herself from the feelings of guilt, hesitation and self-doubt which had held her in their grip.
References:


