

POSTCOLONIAL ELEMENTS IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE*

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Postcolonial theory is one of the prominent theories in academic surroundings from the mid twentieth century. Marxism is the underpinning for postcolonial theory which appears from traditional Marxism in 1970's. Most of the critics and writers give their contribution to the development of postcolonial theory in literature. Many of the works produced by the postcolonial writers essentially deal with colonialism and imperialism. They not merely concentrate on colonial effects but also how far it is degraded the culture and life of individual in the colonized society.

Postcolonial theory has some specific terms to recognize the elements of postcolonial literature. Alterity means the state of being other or different. Diaspora gives the information that people are either willingly or forcefully move to other places from their own homelands. Ethnicity is often related to a person's identity. Another term subaltern is used to denote marginalized and oppressed people, specifically struggling against hegemonic power structure. These are helpful to understand the important elements in postcolonial theory and literature.

Rohinton Mistry is one of the significant writers in Indo-Canadian literature. He is a noteworthy novelist due to his reputable literary works. He has won lot of prizes and Awards for his finest works. He is a well-known short story writer too. His novel *A Fine Balance* has won Canada's Giller Prize, The Commonwealth Writers Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. It is nominated

for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Some of his famous works are *One Sunday* (1983), *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such A Long Journey* (1992), *Family Matters* (2002) and *The Scream* (2008). He has got great reputation among the readers as well as writers through his fantastic works.

Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* reveals the tragic life of each individual in the colonized country India. It is the story about the downtrodden and marginalized people in Indian soil. Mistry brings various people from various backgrounds to narrate the story. There are four major characters in this novel. They are Ishvar, Omprakash, Maneck and Dina Dalal. The story revolves around these four characters till the end of the novel. Ishvar and Omprakash are measured as untouchables. So they are treated crucially by the high class people in this novel. They are migrated to the city life to guard themselves from caste system. Maneck is a Parsi student who also comes to the city for studying engineering to balance his family's financial crisis. Dina is a Parsi woman who tries to build an independent life for her. From these four characters Mistry describes the struggles, mistreatment and pathetic situations of marginalized and downtrodden people in the society. Next, he also portrays how they are closely tied up with dominance wherever they go. Therefore Mistry's *A Fine Balance* elaborately deals with many postcolonial elements such as subaltern issues, diaspora, identity, alienation and alterity.

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In *A Fine Balance* Mistry mainly elucidates the atrocities committed on the two poor people who are come from a small village. Ishvar Darji and Omprakash are the two villagers who have lost their life and struggled with identity crisis in postcolonial India. From these two people, he has explained the unheard voices of the subaltern and untouchables in Indian society. The author has portrayed the subjugation of low class people especially under the name of caste system in rural Indian society. In this novel not only Ishvar and Omprakash has undergone this suppression but their family members and their entire village people faced the same problem. Mistry reveals the real and existing gloomy side of India in *A Fine Balance*. In this literary piece, the people are suppressed and oppressed by economic, political and social crisis. Mistry shows the dangerous and pitiful life of subaltern people in Indian society at first.

Mistry talks about the subaltern and marginalized people's life during the Emergency act declared in postcolonial India. In *A Fine Balance* Mistry exposes that the chammaar caste, the downtrodden and other untouchables are treated very badly by the upper class people. They are often tormented by them. They are never known as human beings but considered as beast. He again stresses an important point which is still prevailing in colonial India even after the independence. He mentions that many low class subaltern people depend on the rich upper class people for their economic survival throughout their life. Therefore several Thakurs who are belonged to high class society have hired the village low class people for their works. They have only paid small wage for the low class people which are not enough for their labour. It is the easiest way to the high class people to suppress and exploit the low class people very easily in the society. If the untouchable raise their voice against this cruel activity of the Thakurs, they merely violated by the Thakurs. Thakurs are the upper class people in India. From this

incident, the author highly insists that Dhuki and other low class people do not get proper wage for their hard work. They get only low payment from their owner. Even though they get angry on them, they do not do anything against them. As a suppressed and marginalized untouchable they cannot get proper income for their hard work. But their high class owners are happy with sucking the blood of all the hardworking low class people.

Next, Mistry presents the conditions of the suppressed and oppressed people especially how they are restricted to enter into the holy places and the street of the high class people. They are measured as an impure people in the sight of high class people in Indian society. It is shown by the author through the characters Ishvar and Narayanan. They are treated badly when they enter into the classroom due to the over excitement to see the classroom. According to the teacher, they have polluted the class and the learning tools because of their touch and presence there. So the teacher has beaten them ferociously. When their father Dhuki knows it, he wants justice for his sons. So he approaches Pundit Laluram to get justice for his sons. But the high class Pundit gives the favour to his class man not to Dhuki Mochi and his sons. This show the untouchables never get Justice in their life. Hence the suppressed and marginalized are forced to live their life under the dictatorship of the high class people. If they refuse to obey the norms and words of the high class people, they suddenly meet their tragic end in their life.

Then the caste system not only brings troubles to the low class men but also to the women. The women are crushed in the hands of upper class men. Purity and virginity are the wealth of a woman. Sometimes their wealth is plundered by the crucial animals in the name of high class men. So many untouchable women are lost their life in the hands of upper class people in *A Fine Balance*. Dhuki's wife is violated by a high class man when

she has gone to pluck some oranges from the orchard of a landowner. Unluckily, she is caught by the watchman of the garden and he forced her to make him happy. He outrages the modesty of the woman in the night. This is happened to Dhuki's wife and also to so many women in the village. This evil activity also brings by the author in his novel. It shows that the suppressed people are condemned by their impurity in one side. In another side their virtue is violated to get happiness by the high class people. It is a pathetic condition of untouchables in the society. Though they think to protest, they cannot execute it in their actions. Because when Narayanan oppose the act of high class men, his family and his supporters become the prey for those high class men. Through this we can see the slavery of the downtrodden people in the novel *A Fine Balance*.

Dina Dalal is another character in this novel. After Dhuki's family, she is the next one who is suffered under subjugation by her close relatives. In her case, she encounters male domination. As a woman, she fights to make an independent world for her own. But she cannot make it till the end of the novel. She struggles a lot under the dominance of her brother. She is suppressed by her brother after the death of her father. She tries to stand economically independent in her life but she cannot attain it throughout the novel. Then there are so many minor characters they are living at the slum in sea city also suppressed in the name of political power in this novel. Their life is demolished by the name of a political leader. The author vividly depicts one idea that there is no change in the life of downtrodden and marginalized people. Because before independence they have suppressed by the colonizer and now it's replaced by high class political power. In this way, Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is dealt with subaltern issues and makes it as subaltern novel.

Mistry deals with another postcolonial element that is identity crisis in *A Fine Balance*. Through the protagonist, the author gives an idea about

self-identity. Then other characters are constantly searched for their identity. In the case of Ishvar and Omprakash, they move to sea city to begin new life and to acquire new identity. Likewise Maneck moves to abroad to create a new identity. Dina Dalal starts her life as a seamstress to get new identity. Then Narayanan the father of Omprakash shapes himself as a tailor to earn specific identity but it goes vain.

All the characters in *A Fine Balance* do not obtain their self-identity. Ishvar and Omprakash both could not get their identity even though they have learnt the art of sewing with the help of Ashraf. They cannot establish themselves as well-known tailors even in their own land due to caste system. They also cannot show themselves as perfect tailors in the sea city due to political changes. There is no possibility to reach their destination. Finally they get the identity what they ever expected in their life. At the end of the novel, they are not become the ideal tailors instead they become beggars. Dina Dalal is another important character who tries to achieve her identity as an independent woman in this novel. She is a Parsi woman, she has faced so many difficulties in her life. She could not create a reputable and independent identity for her own. Dina Dalal thinks that she can get an identity with her profession as a doctor but she cannot make it real. This is the first failure of Dina Dalal to make her own identity in the society. Then she shapes herself as a seamstress but she cannot carry out this profession successfully in her life. Because of financial crisis she cannot continue her life as seamstress in the society. Her destiny makes her dependent to her brother at the climax of the novel. Then Maneck is lacking his identity when he feels he is different from others in his college days.

Maneck's father Farokh Kohlah is experienced identity crisis in *A Fine Balance*. He is always identified himself with his beautiful land. In the beginning he is a wealthy person especially before the partition of India. He is identified with

his wealth. His family has good name and identity in his homeland. After the partition, most of his lands are left from his hand and his family sinks into poverty. Later his family runs a soft drink shop in their native land. His family is identified with this new shop especially the drink is called by their family name. After the arrival of international drinks especially coca cola his business moves to failure. As a result he and his family have lost their identity forever in their native land. Thus every character in this novel faces identity crisis. Mistry as a diasporic writer he deals with diaspora in *A Fine Balance*. Diaspora explains the migration of the people who are willingly or forcibly move to other land from their native land. It is apt in the life of the two untouchables who are migrated to the city from their native land. Ishvar and Omprakash both are forcibly move to the city life to continue their remaining life time. They cannot achieve their dreams in their migrated city. They cannot adapt the life style of the city people. It is very hard to them to manage everything properly. The two untouchables could not mingle with other city people because of their low background. From here the writer concentrates on their lives in the big city amidst their fellow men and their dissatisfaction with the city life and their desire to go back to their native place. It is highlighted in the words of one of his major characters Ishvar in this novel. He says that nothing is as fine as a one's native place. They only consider themselves different or other in their newly migrated place.

Ishvar and Omprakash are also feeling alienated when they have spent their time in the sea city. After some times, the two untouchables force to live their life as street dogs in the sea city. Like nomads, they move from nawaz's awning to their slum dwelling, then to railway platform, then to the entrance of chemist's shop where they are mistaken for beggars, compelled to drag as labourers and finally released from the inviolable hell by the beggarmaster. They are struggled a lot for their survival. They have taken to the City

Beautification Programme without their interest and worked as labours for few months. In this time, they are forced to migrate to various places in the city. It gives them the feeling of nostalgia and longing for their native land.

Maneck is another important person in *A Fine Balance* who has diasporic experiences in his life. He is migrated to the sea city regarding his college life. He departs his protective environment of his home in the hills to the college in the city. It makes him often worry about his memorable days in his native land. He feels nostalgic about the happy days in his native village. He feels inconvenient in the new land. He could not make himself adjustable within the migrated city. He feels isolation in his migrated city in India. In between the novel Maneck is moved to the foreign country that is Dubai for his profession. He is forced to move for this foreign country to eradicate his father's financial crisis in India. He migrates to the new land only for economic development but the atmosphere in the new land gives him the feeling of alienation. He is displaced in the new country. Therefore he often feels nostalgia about his past life.

Thus Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is dealt with the suppressed and marginalized people's sufferings, their quest for identity, their insecurity in alien land and their self-alienation from family and the society. The author gives importance to the postcolonial elements in this novel. Therefore he concentrates on the postcolonial elements such as Subaltern issues, Diaspora, Identity crisis and Alienation in this novel. In this way, he makes himself as one of the best Postcolonial writers in the world.

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