

**Tribhuvan University**

**Critique of Post-Emergency Indian Official History in  
Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance***

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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### Abstract

*The research paper analyzes the historical fiction A Fine Balance by Indian Parsi writer, Rohinton Mistry from the perspective of New-Historicism. It revisits the history of Post-colonial India; particularly Post-Emergency mainstream history from the perspective of Mistry's marginalized literary characters in order to argue that the official history of post-emergency India ignores the socio-political as well as cultural sufferings of the marginalized communities such as Parsi, Chammar and women. It further analyzes and critiques that the mainstream narration of Post-colonial India as a nation of independence, freedom and equality bears irony because of the socio-political exclusions of the marginal communities from the mainstream in the name of caste, race and gender. The caste-based treatment against the characters like Dukhi, Narayan and Ishvar, the religious violence against Muslim character like Ashraf and the patriarchal dominance against the female character's individual freedom like Dina Dalal fictionally contradict the official post-colonial metanarrative of independence, freedom and equality. In order to strengthen the argument, the researcher borrows the theoretical insights from Foucauldian 'New Historicism' and the theoretical concept of 'Irony' to show that the mainstream history is ironical to the actuality of the time. The paper exposes the discursive construction of post-emergency Indian official history of the marginal people of the Indian society. The paper concludes with finding that literature through the fictional narrative contributes to offering an alternative view to the actuality of the history.*

Keywords: Discourse, New Historicism, Mainstream history, Alternative history,

Post-Emergency India

Critique of Post-Emergency Indian Official History in  
Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

The research paper entitled "Critique of Post-Emergency Indian Official History in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*" attempts to revisit the history of postcolonial Indian history, especially after the post-emergency period in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* from the perspective of new historicism. The paper makes literary operation into the mainstream post-emergency history by offering the alternative picture of the historical account that challenges the official production of historical truth. The historical novel named *A Fine Balance* by Indian Parsi writer Rohinton Mistry depicts the social struggles, sufferings and oppression of the Parsi and Muslim community, low-caste Chammar people as well as the patriarchal dominance over female members during the political turmoil of the state of emergency in the 1970s. Modeling the novel into the genre of historical novel, Mistry digs a deeper excavation into the realistic picture of the historical oppression and marginalization of the Parsi community although the mainstream documentation of the official history glorifies the postcolonial India as an independent, democratically free country with the promising of the freedom for all groups and communities.

This paper analyzes Mistry's *A Fine Balance* presenting the ideas of the socio-cultural identity crisis of the Parsi as well as other marginalized communities during the period of post-emergency. The paper deals with Mistry's perception of the Indian Parsi society along with the community of Muslim, Chammar and women and their socio-cultural standing from 1960 to 1990 in Bombay. His novels deal with major Indian social problems and imbalance of Indian society where the protagonists' themselves are victim of the emergency period. Mistry explores the relationship of Parsi, Muslim, Lower-caste Chammar and women in their community, their socio-

cultural identity and uniqueness of their community living. Misty's novel is all about social problems and struggle of minority groups in India.

The story moves around the four characters Om, Ishvar, Maneck, Dina and Narayan. All these characters do not belong to the same community. Some of them belong to underprivileged Chamaar community and some belong to Parsi community. But the novel presents how the poor or marginalized community was deprived of social freedom, independence, social equality and dignity. They came to the city; Bombay from the village in order to construct their new identity by challenging the traditional lifestyle imposed by traditional caste restrictions of the society. In the novel voice of one character identifies "Life without dignity is worthless" (144). This line clearly shows that they want their self-dignity in the society where they live. But, in the course of working in the city, they have to face many difficulties. Finally, finding no freedom and independent life in the city, they return to their own villages.

Among the other characters, Dina Dalal main protagonist of the novel has different form of oppression. She was from wealthy background. But as a female, unlike post-colonial narrative of freedom, she was forced to be confined within the four walls because of her tyrannical brother: "Dina experiences history differently...Dina is forced to face her brother's tyranny, Independence/partition becomes responsible for an erosion of meaning in the life of Dina because she is forced to remain indoors and to face her brother's despotic regime" (Zafar and Ajoy 3). Her domestication and marginalization is explained in the narrative line: "But a few days later, riots started in the city, in the wake of Partition and the British departure, and Dina was stuck at home with Nusswan" (25). This narrative line evidently raises the suspect on the official history and its valorization of the freedom and independence. Dina's confinement by her patriarchal brother just because she was

female reflects a lot about the gender discrimination that was rampant during the time. This is where the characters' socio-political sufferings surprisingly provide the alternative picture of the post-colonial Indian history.

In the novel Mistry developed characters from different socio-economic background in order to dig truth/experience of minority during emergency. It also offers to the fact that emergency was a diabolic punishment imposed to people. All major characters were from different background meet with each other in the same place. Although they belong to different places of the India but their suffering was the same. Mistry has presented the life of middle class Parsi family, Muslim people, Lowe-caste Chammar and women who feel insecure because of the growing political power in Bombay. *A fine Balance* is presented in the light of the post- independent India and more especially in the political times of Indira Gandhi's rule when the fundamental rights of the citizen were controlled by her ideological program of Emergency. Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is an authentic record of how the Post-Emergency Indian history violated the fundamental rights of the citizens, basically those of the people from marginalized communities. The novel shows the suffering of the outcastes, Parsis and innocent Muslim and Chammar people who were trying to survive their life in the society. The minority people who are the main characters in this novel were injured became homeless, and hopeless.

In the context of the novel, Mistry portrays a world of suppression and discrimination which has been overshadowed by the mainstream representation. It presents the world of Post-Emergency political scenario from the perspective of those minorities' sufferings so that the official history is resituated. Therefore, the present paper probes into how these minority people could establish their socio-economic and cultural identity in the society where they were always suppressed. What are the

situations of minority people in Paris society? Why characters of the novel struggle to establish their socio-cultural identity? What are the challenges that exist for minority groups like Parsis in India? How were the government and its treatment towards those minor groups in the corner of society?

Thus in the novel Rohinton provides us so many evidence which clearly shows how minority groups werw treated in the period of emergency. Narayan, another major character of the novel was brutally killed by the high class people because he tried to caste vote in the election. He comes from the Chammar community, the so-called untouchable community. His lower class status doesn't entitle him to caste the vote in the election. But he resisted the rule and takes courage to join the election line and drop the vote. His move agitates the high class. Following it, Narayan is beaten severely and is left hanging in the tree. Later on, he dies of brutal physical beatings. During their childhood, Narayan and Ishvar entered the school. As a member of the lower caste community, it was a restriction for them to enter the school. But they entered. It resulted into the physical harassment and cruel abuse from the school. Here, Narayan's murder and Ishvar's brutal physical harassment because of their efforts to exercise their social privileges depict the disorder, chaos and systematic oppression of the marginal communities in the time of post-emergency period.

Likewise, Narayan and Ishvar's mother, Roopa is raped by the Zamindar's son. The inhuman act remains unnoticed by the police station despite their reports. It was the time of emergency ruling as imposed by Indira Gandhi's government. Everything was in chaos and disturbance. The police sided with the Zamindar's family because of their higher social position. Ishvar's family was rather threatened by the police and was poorly treated. Police's ignorance of the rape shows the inner

working of the oppression and suppression that marginal communities suffered during the political turmoil.

On the other hand, Dina, one of the female characters, is controlled by her brother. Dina Dalal who was widow, manages her livelihood by sewing and other characters Om and Ishvar also joined sewing with her in order to maintain their cultural identity during Post-Emergency in Indian society. They live in the public shelter. However, their dream for making an identity destroyed after the shelter is bulldozed which was a part of government's emergency program. Character's oppression contradicts the promise of mainstream history after independence from British that glorifies the freedom, independence and identity. Dina along with other characters has to suffer a lot of difficulties because of societal structure in the city of Bombay.

All these textual references capture the oppressive socio-political atmosphere during the time of emergency which subjected marginal people to the marginalization. They did not get any freedom, independence and socio-political privilege due to their membership from lower communities. This picture contradicts the mainstream representation of Indian society during the time of Emergency. The paper therefore, aims to explore in details the contradiction and critiques the limitation in the official history of post-emergency Indian history as presented in the fictional novel *A Fine Balance*.

The mainstream metanarrative of postcolonial Indian history, after the partition, during state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi-led government and her assassination, is challenged by Mistry's literary representation by showing the social oppressions, struggles, exclusions, alienations and marginalization of the Parsi characters due to the then political atmosphere. Reading the novel from the vantage

point of historical picture when the Parsi people were deprived of the social and cultural identity, L. V. Luven asserts, “A *Fine Balance* is not merely a family saga but narrates key events of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian history from the perspective of the Parsi as well as the Hindu Chamaar community. This means that *A Fine Balance*, like *Such a Long Journey*, presents history from the margin” (qtd. in Bhatta and Zafar 33). Here, Luven insists on the fact that Mistry’s historical novel *A Fine Balance* offers the versions of historical events inflected by the community memberships of its protagonists.

The mainstream historiographers failed to represent in the mainstream representation of Indian official history. The novel presents the social atmosphere of the post-emergency Indian history filled with the oppressions, exclusions, marginalization and alienations inflicted by the discriminative political system. Shabistan Zafar and Ajoy Batta write, “The Emergency curtails any kind of individual freedom” (4). The declaration of state of emergency severely affected the lives of the marginal communities like Parsi, Muslim, lower-caste and female characters in the novel:

Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine balance* is a novel of epic proportions – in length, subject and creativity. While the story is uniquely Indian. It is also universally human. Set during the Emergency of 1975, the book perfectly captures the emotions of the untouchables and Dalits whose rights were denied and their freedom snatched away. Though Mistry just left India before Emergency, he was well updated on the events and happenings related to it that he made full use of it in his novel. Mistry conveys with thunderous impact the incredible poverty and fragile line between living and existing in a country besieged with political squalor and sociologic catastrophic of the extant caste system. (Lissy

25)

This review gives an additional reference to support the fact that Mistry's novel mostly reflect his historical consciousness and represent the voiceless and repressed as well as suppressed living conditions of the people from the marginal communities during the time of the political and social transitions. Here, Lissy observes upon the aspect of Mistry's fictional representation of those marginal and oppressed communities like untouchables and Dalits who encountered the oppressive behaviors and gruesome tortures during the time of emergency. The oppressive social and political treatment upon Parsi people and Chammar and Muslims after emergency can be realized when one of the major characters, Om says, "What kind of life, what kind of country is this, where we cannot come and go as we please" (541). He further says that poor people like him and his uncle are "less than animals" (540).

This research paper hereby applies the theoretical methodology of New Historicism because this theory looks at the history from alternative perspective. New historicism as a theoretical observation of the power politics into different organs of the social spectrum asserts that no historical truth is linear and objective. New historicism emerged in the replacement and response to the old historicism which claimed that the historical truth is objective and absolute. New historicism focus on subjective reality and it provide way to examine and de-mistify historical truth. In order to challenge mainstream history this theory can be useful for critical examination of history.

However, some new historicists strongly opposed the idea of historical truth as the absolute. Rather, they proposed the new idea and belief that historical truth is more questionable because the historiography is influenced by the power politics: "New Historicism argues that there is no universal meaning or truth in history and that

meaning imputed to history reflects power relations at the time of writing as well as the time of the events' occurrence" (Hoover 356). Here, Hoover makes it clear that the new historicists bluntly refute the previous representation of history as a central or universal truth. There is no universal meaning or truth behind the historical narratives because the history as a discipline is not independent of the manipulative power politics. The mainstream historical representation is always manipulated by those in power in order to serve the history in the service of their interests.

The founder of New Historicism, Michelle Foucault talks about the discourse created by those in power and their discourse make a historical truth in their favor. Deeply operating into the inner working of the power politics of the elite in power, Foucault exposes that the powerful ones construct the narrative discourse through which they cleverly create a knowledge which is established as an unquestionable truth. He sharply unfolds how the power politics mold the actuality of the historical events into their side. Foucault asserts, "Discourse is controlled, limited, defined and exercised by power and draws to the way boundaries between the true and false are erected within this context" (42). Here, Foucault clearly shows the point of departure from the observation of the old historicist. He stands in stark opposition to the old historicist who presented history as the linear development and believed in the centrality of the historical truth.

However, Foucault introduces alternative way of looking at the history from the perspective of the power politics. He argues that history is not independent. Those in power control and execute the historical representation. A social fabric has the hierarchical distribution of power relations in which those in the top of the power structure construct the discourse and control as well as define as long as it serves in the interest of the people holding power. By discourse, Foucault refers to the system

of thoughts, beliefs, practices and the pattern of thinking. The historiography is the way of representing the history. The historiographers advocate for those in power when representing the certain historical events. The influence of the powerful ones in authority does not let the history be documented as a fair and transparent representation.

Mistry is one of those writers who strongly reject the historical truth because he understands how the actual historical facts are fabricated by those in power to serve their interests: “Mistry regards historiography to be an elite agenda, a political stance that history too is a fabricated tale of powerful as to how they gained power and then how did they manage to perpetuate this domination; questioning history he unmasks lots of political scandal to make commoners awake from their common sense and their ‘false consciousness’” (12). Mistry’s fictional representation of the historical period of post-colonial India, particularly post-emergency socio-political scenario breaks the celebration of mainstream Indian history and offers the alternative frame to look into the actuality of the socio-political oppressions and manipulations of the marginalized communities.

Mistry is widely known for his representation of the history from the perspective of marginalized. He observes the history as an event that happens to those in margins but not to those in power. One of the critics of Mistry’s fictional representation of history, Guy Lawson rewards Mistry as a writer with the socio-historical consciousness that looks at the history from the marginal characters. They reflect the history from those lapses, sufferings and experiences that the mainstream historiography downplays as insignificant historical events. He compares Mistry’s historical novels with that of Charles Dickens who is famous for the novels with historical perspective. He observes, “Mistry and Dickens are interested in those to

whom history happens” (22). Here, the history is viewed from the social and political sufferings of the characters belonging to different underprivileged communities such as Parsi, Chammar, female and Muslim. The socio-political portrait of life of those in marginal status of the Indian society is revisited by Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* in the form of the fictional work to view the post-colonial India like Shahi Tharoor rewards the novel as the significant landmark in the recent Indian fiction in English: “a stark and moving portrait of life during the Emergency” (169).

Mistry himself witnessed the atrocity of the lives of the marginalized groups like Parsi while he was in India. He authored the fiction while staying in Canada through the means of memory. Although it seems to be an imaginative narrative but the novel represents the actual events during the time of the post-emergency period. Before his historical fiction is understood from the point of fictional representation only, he claims with a line in the epigraph of the novel that the socio-political tragedy of the characters in the novel are all true and actual:

Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your armchair, you will say to yourself. Perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured: this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true. (epigraph)

This novel is not only a critique of emergency but also a paralyzed state of politics that resolved the trouble/trauma encountered by the people. This novel primarily critique emergency and secondarily questioned post-emergency political upheaval that barely addressed the issue of poor people. The post-colonial Indian history, in particular the post-emergency official history celebrated the metanarrative of freedom, independence, equality, democracy but the alternative truth was that the marginalized

and poor communities like these characters including Dina's gender oppression show how ironical and hypocritical the Indian official history was.

Similarly, I will apply the theory of irony to argue that post-emergency Indian history was not as true as it is documented by the mainstream historiographers. Irony is employed by the writer in order to critique paradoxical version of progress imposed by Indian congress in general and Indira Gandhi in particular. What the official history said and what the marginalized and oppressed communities suffered has the difference. Similarly, the title of the book shows writer's ironical satire. He ironically exposes the hypocrisy of the mainstream post-colonial historical narration of balanced and perfectly democratic India and shows how imbalance and chaotic the Indian history is through the struggles, oppressions, exploitations suffered by the characters. Through alternative history Mistry attempts to reject the socio-economic, political and cultural during the phase of emergency. Mistry wants to provide agency to downtrodden and marginalized people.

Many critics have analyzed *A Fine Balance* in the light of social political novel. However, few critics, including Sudha Bhuchar and Reenu Kumar explored that Dina Dalal, Omprakash and Ishvar Darji as heroic figures who struggle till the end of the novel for their cultural identity. In mid-70's India, in an unnamed city by the sea, four unlikely characters come together, in order to gain cultural identity and mentioning position in the society by proving themselves as an independence people. Dina Dalal is losing her grasp on her financial independence. A middle-aged widow, what independence she does have was hard-won. After the death of her father, she was treated like a domestic servant by her tyrannical older brother who sacrificed her education and sought only to marry her off to a propitious match as soon as one could be found. "Dina is young girl, full of energy. It will be good for her, teach her how to

look after a home” (18). Her brother wants to teach Dina how to do house work rather than giving her education. “I’m very late today, Dina. Please wash my things. I’m not your servant! Wash your own dirty plates!” (19).

This kind of behavior towards Dina clearly shows that she was oppressed by her brother and she is fighting for her self-respect. Sudha Bhuchar an actress and playwright of London talks about Mistry’s novel which presents the social problems and struggle of lower cast, poor people like Omprakash, Ishvar Darji and protagonist Dina Dalal. She talks about characters actions which help them to gain self-respect in the society. Characters examine their own lives in an unending search for better way to live. Om and Ishvar have the course of their lives where they have to struggle to make a position in the society.

Furthermore she points out that life of ordinary people caught up in momentous event that they have little control over. Their resilience forces them to forge an existence and seek to lead good and purposeful lives in the society. In the novel the parsi widow Dina Dalal becomes an independence person through the course of time by coming together in a totally unlikely friendship with tailors Om and Ishvar. “There was no such thing as perfect privacy; life was a perpetual concert-hall recital with captive audience” (56). In the course of their struggle to survive, their lives become entwined with host of unusual character. In Bhuchar’s view Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* paints interconnected lives, dreams, fighting for self-dignity and shining a light on unkind society is very difficult for them.

In the same way, another article by Reenu Kumar explores the relationship of Parsi in their community, their cultural identity and self-dignity of their spirit. Tailors Ishvar and his nephew Omprakash ‘Om’ Darji have come to the big city in search of work and accept an offer from Dina to sew under her supervision in her flat. “Believe

me, it will get better. And we'll soon go back to our village" (91). After coming into the city they have dream of gaining self-respect in the society by earning money.

Ishvar and Om's family story is one of unconscionable tragedy. They originate from a small village where their family belongs to an untouchable caste comprising leather workers, tanners and cobblers. Their family history is one of inescapable prejudice, violence, rape, torture and murder that they have survived by humiliation and forbearance. It was an act of bravery, desperation and blasphemy on the part of the previous generation to break caste and adopt tailoring as their family's future.

It is their hope that the city offers them money and opportunities by which they can return to their village and reinvigorate their trade in their traditional home. In the same way Dina is a independence lady in contrast to her brother Nusswan, who is ambitionless and jealous of his sister because she is beautiful and sexually attractive. "Look at you with your little breasts starting to grow. You think you are women already. I should cut them right off, along with your wicked tongue" (24). He punishes her by pinching her and threatens her to cut off her tongue when she teases him. He observed her secretly after bath when she stands naked. Another character Dustoor who is priest looks Dina with amorous intention. "No back talk, I'm warning you" (23). Her brother mistreats her, beats her to perform menial tasks at home and forces her to follow and serve his wife.

Presenting the characters struggle to gain self-respect, Patricia Goldblatt points out the situation of tailors in India. Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is the story of the heroic struggle of tailors whose attempts at survival become the microcosm for all the suffering poor in India. The story winds and unwinds to envelop strands from the tailors present, past and future. Goldblatt explores that "when we first meet the two men, they excited and nervous hoping to secure jobs" (94). They are from lower cast

family so their parents send them to Bombay city for better future. They try to break away of the cast systems by positioning themselves in the society. They all are seeking for existence in the society which helps them to gain self-dignity. Hence, the paper intends to explore how *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry reflects the reality of India where poor underprivileged and marginalized as well as oppressed people have to face many difficulties to own self-respect in the society.

This novel is an analysis about the suffering and pains of the marginalized and oppressed communities during the emergency period of Indian history. The history of India takes us back to the time of independence in 1947 when India launched a movement for the independence from the two-century long rule of the British colonization. India was not as free nation as it is now when the British colonial discourse captured Indian Territory and started ruling over it. As the decolonization movement was spread around the world, India under the non-violent idealism of Mahatma Gandhi began an independence movement for the freedom and sovereignty of India from the external colonial politics of Britain.

This novel also critiques the promises made by freedom fighter after Indian independence of 1947 in sense that no reformation came in the life of poor or downtrodden people. Under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, the movement for freedom, independence and equality collapsed the long-held colonization and finally liberated India from the British hold. After the end of colonization began the actual post-colonial history of India with the enchanting aspiration of freedom, equality, independence and representation of all voices. However, Indian history suffered another tragedy in the form of the growing religious conflict between Muslim and Hindus. The miserable conflict between the two resulted into the dark history of partition and fragmented the newly liberated India into Pakistan and India. Even after

the partition, India celebration of independence, freedom and equality suffered the failure because another section of victims came into existence because of the hypocritical and oppressive political system and rulers.

Although Indian independence from British promised a new wave of celebration for the freedom, independence and equality among the Indians, it rather ended up repeating the chain of oppressions and suppressions that gave birth to another section of groups and communities that were deprived of the social and political privileges. These new groups were the downtrodden sections of the Indian society such as untouchable's low-caste community, remaining Indian Muslims after the formation of Pakistan, underprivileged community like Chammar, poor communities as well as the discriminative gender system that marginalized the status of the women in the mainstream society.

The system of oppressive ideology came into climax during the time of Indira Gandhi who was elected as the prime minister after general election of 1971. It was during her time when she declared the state-of-Emergency in the name of restructuring the Indian society for the betterment and development. It was an ideological program of Mrs. Gandhi in order to divert the attention of the common people and trick them into believing that the program of Emergency was intended at smoothing the progress and developmental speed of the nation. In doing so, the state applied all the means and resources and imposed the state of emergency to carry the program of beautification by demolishing the poor slums to keep the city beautiful and sterilization of the people in order to control the population of the country and increase the developmental activities. Mrs. Gandhi imposed the decision by the exercise of power in an autocratic style even without caring the views of the opposition parties in the parliament. Historicizing the whole miserable picture of

State-of-Emergency by Mrs. Gandhi in the name of the progress, Sadia Ashraf asserts that:

The ideology of Emergency is so internalized through all institutions that all departments become instruments in the hands of the power holders to exercise their power and influence on all the poor, weak people. Under this very Emergency a twenty point program was introduced to speed up the progress of the country and to make the nation more regular. City beautification was also one of these twenty point program; this city beautification plan includes the abolishing of all jhopadpatties. These slum areas are very common near all big cities as a home to thousands of poor homeless workers who are here in these big cities in search of jobs, industrialization in its wake encourages urbanization which needs slums to flourish. (16)

This historical observation shows the hegemonic and oppressive policy adopted by Mrs. Gandhi in the mask of progressing India. These lines evidently depict the miserable conditions of the poor workers and people who depended on the slums for their survival.

Likewise, it also exposes the hidden interests of the then government under the leadership of Indira Gandhi to impose the power and exploit the people in their interest. The discourse of progressive India initiated by Gandhi was in one way or another is targeted to the poor workers and marginalized communities. It only caused the sufferings and pains on the part of the underprivileged groups. Further offering the oppressive system of Emergency in the name of development, Sadia explains:

Similarly, the episode of sterilization or population control program which were initiated during this obnoxious period of Emergency is also replete with hair raising horrifying details. Family planning program were also the part of

this satanic game of power where power structure is playing with the commoners. Mrs. Gandhi raised the slogan to make the nation more disciplined and to accelerate the speed of progress. The forced sterilization program leads the nation towards a gendered balance a more crippled state by amputating the one person and castrating the other. You see the government employees have to produce two or three cases for sterilization. If they don't fill their quota their salary is held back for that month by the government. (16)

These lines expose the brutal and controlled as well as oppressive system of suppression from the government level to snatch away the rights of the commoners. All the orders about the forced sterilization and demolition of slums as well as imposed family planning were executed without any sympathetic and considerable concerns over the pathetic conditions of the poor and underprivileged groups of people.

Although the State-of-Emergency policy seems to be more nationalistic project for the nation but it was an ideological discourse to divert the attention of people and exploit them for covering up of the frauds they applied in winning the election to come to power. Sadia critically argues:

Reality of Emergency was actually imposed to hide the fraud in elections by the then Prime-Minister Mrs. Gandhi. State uses all means; all power tools; repressive and ideological to give the reality a false coloring of their own interests. Ideology, hegemony and discourse all the three theories of power are manipulated by the state machinery to make public not only comply with all political decisions instantly but to accept it as only existing reality. (11)

These lines expose the hidden ideological motive of those in power behind their discourse. The history of state-of –Emergency was constructed to justify Mrs.

Gandhi's decision as her patriotic slogan while the fact is that it was hegemonized and imposed in order to drive people into trusting that Mrs. Gandhi was a true leader for the then Indian development.

The actuality was that it was just a political propaganda to conceal Gandhi's fraudulent acts in winning the election to get her to power. On the other hand, the imposed Emergency was forceful and monolithic which didn't care for the ethnic and cultural differences that made Indian democracy:

To justify the decision of Emergency and to legitimize all atrocities, state uses all repressive and ideological tools; all state machinery departments and institutes and diffuse the discourse of Emergency in all social circle. It is not only destroying human capacity to survive rather giving rise to fundamentalism, extremism, materialism, essentialism ignoring all differences which are the recognition of India as a democracy. Different ethnic minorities are feeling difficult to maintain their original identity and are fighting with all essentialism and universalism. Parse are fearful of impending cultural erosion which is designed to merge their identity with the main stream culture. wars, curfews, blackouts, war sirens, communal riots, and above all this internal strife of Emergency is making the situation even more badly... This is the era of forceful eviction, forceful sterilization, forceful labor and the use of force in everything. (14)

These lines further shed a larger light upon the oppressed, suppressed and controlled atmosphere as well as the humanitarian crisis during the time of the emergency. It was the time of the forceful sterilization, eviction and there was authoritative force in everything. Like Foucault claims that history is constructed by those in power by creating discourse. The whole program of emergency was a discourse constructed by

Mrs. Gandhi's government to hegemonized and exercise the power to serve the interests of the powerful.

Mistry's *A Fine Balance* presents exactly the hegemonizing and discriminative discourse of post-emergency Indian politics that created a chaos and disturbance in the peaceful life of the minor ethnic and marginalized communities of the then Indian society. Reading the novel as a satirical representation of the actual historical account of Post-Emergency period, Sadia argues:

Mistry's work characteristically exposes a contradiction and the false and fragile nature of ideologies by exposing promises and commitments of the hegemonic block, and the tensions and disillusionment of the dominated. In *A fine Balance* the character articulate the writer's concerns. The problems of caste, creed, class, untouchability, economic disparities, political slogans partition, globalization and technological advancement with its focus on rapacious profit are discussed more vocally than before...The Novel *A Fine Balance* contains a scathing satire on the governmental policies and ideologies to perpetuate the power relations. (14)

Sadia's observation holds the truth that Mistry exposes the contradiction of the ideology constructed by the then government in the name of the progress and development of India. He shows the contradiction by depicting the problems of the caste, creed, gender violence, untouchability and the socio-political impact on the minor communities by the forceful programs of the state. It can be realized at the brutal treatment of the untouchable community of Chammar represented by Ishvar and Narayan. They suffer the caste-based harassment and severe physical punishment when they try to enter the school. They are cruelly beaten to unconsciousness when they entered the temple of learning during their childhood. They are accused of

polluting and making the school unholy by the teacher just because they were from untouchable caste. They were stripped in front of the whole school: “You Chamaar rascals! Very brave you are getting, daring to enter the school! He twisted their ears till they yelped with pain and started to cry...Is this what your parents teach you? To defile the tools of learning and knowledge...Now get out, and don't let your unclean faces be seen here ever again” (*AFB* 111). After this incident, Dukhi, the father of Ishvar and Narayan rebels the caste system by promising to change the profession of his sons and change the hierarchical position of the society from tanning to tailoring.

However, the higher class people of the society burn Dukhi's family alive for distorting the timeless balance of the society. Similarly, the caste-based violence during the transitional period of emergency is further illustrated when Narayan is flogged and hung naked in the village square just because he was trying to caste vote in the parliamentary elections. He was bruised to death. His brother Ishvar and Om rushed to police to fill up F.I.R against the violence but the corrupted bureaucratic system rejected their case because of their low caste status: “What kind of rascality is this? Trying to fill up the F.I.R with lies? You filthy achool castes are always out to make troubles! Get out before we charge you with public mischief” (149).

This incident clarifies the effects of the terrible of emergency when everything was corrupted and controlled by the wicked people as one of the characters in the novel asserts, “these Emergency times are terrible, sister. Money can buy the necessary police order; Justice is sold to the highest bidder” (432). These dialogues and incidents expose the period of emergency as the time of exploitations and violence, destruction and bloodshed as Dodiya reviews, “It reflects the reality of India, the predatory politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, violence and bloodshed. The novel also gives an insight into rural India focusing on injustice, the

cruelty, and the horrors of deprivation and portrays the trauma of India along communal, religious and linguistic lines” (22). The killing of Narayan, burning Dukhi’s family alive, humiliating Chamaar characters as rascals and unclean faces, rejection of any justice by the police textually justify the ironical picture of post-Emergency history of India that always chanted the slogan of freedom, independence and equality.

After the death of hid Narayan who was murdered because he was trying to caste vote in election and raise awareness among his community members and the whole family are burnt alive, Ishvar and Om moves to the city to change their social identity from tanning to tailoring while their friend is sent to Dubai by his father. During one of the conversation, they talk about the emergency. Ishvar asked Dina, “Dinabai, what is this?” “Government problems- games played by people in power. It doesn’t affect ordinary people like us” (8).

This conversation shows the characters’ consciousness of power relations and also how the state is ignorant of the lower position people in the society. But these marginalized community people don’t know how the state ideology is about to destroy their lives. Soon, Om and Ishvar become helpless because of the city beautification program of the Emergency period. Their houses are bulldozed and they are evicted from their scanty existence in the name of the city beautification. They lament on the disappearance of their houses and emerging laws: “But how can they destroy our homes, just like that? They said it’s a new Emergency law...New Law says the city must be made beautiful...The “heartless animals! For the poor there is no justice, ever! We had next to nothing, now it’s nothing! What is our crime, where are to go? (295).

This pathetic dialogue shows the helplessness of the poor and marginal

community before the ideology of the powerful authority. The discourse of Emergency was tactfully and ideologically constructed and imposed by the state to reinforce its interests in such a way that the commoners can't challenge it as Freud opines, "If we speak of the power of laws, institutions and ideologies, if we speak of structure or mechanism of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term 'power' designates relationships between 'partners'" (337). Here, Foucault argues that the powerful ones must create a discourse in order to exercise the power over the others.

Emergency was Mrs. Gandhi's discourse to dominate the groups and hold the power. The forceful discourse of sterilization and beautification severely affected the marginal and poor groups of people taking away their fundamental human rights. The repressive ideology of Gandhi's government violating the rights of the commoners can be realized at the following narrative lines:

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-maintenance of internal security Act...Allows detention without trial, up to two years.

Extensions also available on request, they can do anything they want. Police said it's a new law...Government makes laws without thinking. (*AFB* 299)

These narrative lines reflect Mistry's criticism of Emergency program as the repressive ideology of the government that directly affected and crippled the lives of those in margin. The violating effects of Emergency further are found when the tailoring of Dina and the houses of Om and Ishvar are destroyed by the Emergency law. Through the female character Dina, Mistry shows the gendered oppression of the Post-Emergency India. She struggles to maintain her independence: "The Life of Dina

Dala, Radha and Roopa show how women in general and women belonging to marginalized communities in particular have a long way to go to proclaim themselves independent” (Dr. C.V and Dr. P. Phani 10).

The gender violence during the time was very common. Women were the subject to rape and other physical violence; especially those women from the marginal class were exploited and violated severely. It is seen at Roopa’s brutal rape, who is Ishvar and Narayan’s mother, by a Zamindar’s son. Roopa was Dukhi’s wife who was from untouchable Chamaar community was helpless before the power of the high class people. It shows the lack of independence and freedom in women’s life during the post-Emergency period. Dina belongs to Parsi community. Her life is filled with the pains and sufferings. Her tragedy began with the death of father and husband. She falls under the control of her tyrannical brother who imposes the patriarchal law onto her life without allowing her to live independently. Nusswan, her brother locks her within four walls of the house.

Later on, she seeks a place for independence with the tailoring shop “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” (11). Her tailoring business makes her independent. However, after the emergency was declared in the name of beautification, she lost her shop and is compelled to be controlled by her brother’s control. She as well as Om and Ishvar’s lives are devastated by the Emergency law of beautification and sterilization:

Very soon they are proved wrong. Even their smile dreams are thwarted by the blows dealt by Emergency. The bright future of Om and Ishvar is clouded due to governments massive country-wide family planning programme to check the population explosion in the country. Dina is compelled by her landlord to

vacate the premises on legal grounds that she is illegally carrying on the business and accompanying the tailors and the students as guest. Ultimately left alone to carry on the burden of her life, Dina now is forced to take refuge at her brother Nusswan's much against her will. Mistry comments:

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. (Dr.

C.V and Dr. P. Phani 16)

Mistry's fictional representation of the Post-Emergency Indian official history satirizes upon the mainstream historiography that celebrates the slogan of independence, freedom and equality. Focusing on the personal turmoil, sufferings, pains of the characters from the marginal position of the Indian society during the historical period of Post-Emergency who become of the subject of exploitations, violence and violations of rights, Mistry presents the ironical picture of the mainstream Post-Colonial India, Post-Emergency Indian history in particular. Using the literary device of the irony as an element, he offers an alternative view to the total picture of the mainstream Indian history. It is only through the irony that he succeeds in critiquing the Post-Emergency Indian history. Explaining the nature of Irony theoretically, Muecke explains that irony is a "doubled layered or two-story phenomenon. At the lower level is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony...or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist" (3). Here, basic feature of irony is that it presents things in two levels in appearance and in actuality.

In appearance, the book is entitled as *A Fine Balance* which was a promise of the State-of-Emergency but Mistry ironically attacks how the slogan of Emergency as the program to smooth the nation filled up with the violence, bloodshed, exploitations, discriminations and the loss of lives. He presented the post-Emergency Indian politics

of freedom, independence and equality as a mere political stunt and its failure to felicitate the justice among the socially and politically marginalized minorities. Through the sufferings and struggles of the characters from the minor groups like untouchable, gender and Muslim as well as other poor groups, he exposed the mainstream history as an incomplete picture of history that lacks the representation of those in marginal and oppressed positions.

Mistry expressed his sense of dissatisfaction or evaluation in the indirect form of the irony. He tactfully applied irony as a tool to reflect his attitude towards the representation of Indian history. In theory of irony, Grice observes, “irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation. I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt” (124). Following this observation, it is evidential to conclude that Rohinton critiques the mainstream interpretation of the Post-Emergency Indian history through the use of literary device, irony. He expresses the contempt or incompatibility in the historiography of the Post-Emergency India. The narrative line “In the end, it’s all a question of balance” (231) shows the writer’s observation that there was no balance in the Post-Emergency period as it was represented in the mainstream history because there was no justice, equality and social privilege for those communities like women, Parsi and Chammar in the mainstream socio-political activity.

In this way, the novel *A Fine Balance* revisits the history of Indian Post-Emergency period and uncovers the repressed socio-political and cultural scenario of the time through the lives of the fictional characters. With the ironical title that suggests the balanced and well-ordered society, Rohinton reflects the inner and actual reality of the post-emergency Indian society in which there was no balance like it

manifested in characters' perpetual sufferings. The characters such as Om, Dina, Narayan, Dukhi etc. go through the turmoil. Due to the oppressive political scenario as enforced by Indira Gandhi's emergency program, these characters belonging to different marginal communities cannot get the social and cultural freedom, independence and identity as promised in the aftermath of independence from the British. Their constant struggles to achieve socio-political, economic and cultural identity remain suppressed due to the politics of marginalization from the authoritative discourse as imposed by Indira Gandhi's ruling. However, the mainstream documentation of post-emergency Indian history failed to bring such chaos, disorder and systematic oppression of marginal communities like Chammar, Parsi and gender into the surface. Thus, Mistry's fictional work *A Fine Balance* artistically revisits the post-emergency Indian history and points out the limitations in the official history in an ironic manner.

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