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INDIA IN THE NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE AND ROHINTON MISTRY



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Abstract: In the novels of the Indian English novelists living in foreign countries there is view of Indian life. They present their vision of India and its vast panorama of life with its different dimensions. It focuses on India's multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society. The thematic focus of their novels often deals with the life of Indians who suffer from communal disharmony, caste and religious discriminations, extreme poverty, beliefs and superstitions, manners and customs, ethnicity and religious and cultural diversities. Their writings depict the life of the poor, the middle class as well as the elite society

Keywords: Novels, Rohinton Mistry, communal disharmony, socio-cultural.

INTRODUCTION:

The socio-cultural background is an important factor with all the novelists as they have used Indian motifs around 1970s and 1980s. The image of India that emerges in the novels of Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Bharati Mukherjee highlights their cosmopolitan Indian origin. However, it is interesting to consider the different ethnic origins of these novelists. Bharati Mukherjee is a Bengali Brahmin Hindu settled in America. Her novels also reflect an image of India but she does not consider herself as Indian. She calls herself an American. In her writings she repeatedly emphasizes that she is an American writer. She strives to belong to the main stream literary establishment of America. As against this Rushdie and Mistry belong to the ethnic minorities in India. Though they are settled in the West, they pine for India. They earnestly wish to revive their emotional ties with India. In spite of their fear of ethnic alienation from the post-Independence Indian culture, they look at India as their home land albeit an imaginary one. Salman Rushdie is an Indian Muslim, Rohinton Mistry is a Parsi diasporic India. These writers belong to a new generation of 'cosmopolitan' immigrant writers located in the West. They speak about their multicultural experiences through the post-colonial language of hybridity, they express a sense of continuity with the socio-cultural and political vision of their homeland i.e. India.

Rushdie and Mistry are the expatriate novelists who experienced conflicts and troubles in the Indian society during their stay in India. The post-Independence social and political changes deprived them of their privileged positions and it prompted their immigration to the foreign countries. These expatriate novelists in the Western locales experienced loss of their roots. They felt disillusioned and alienated due to their confrontation with the values of alien culture of the foreign country where they willingly had migrated. Their dislocation from the native country's culture

provides them with a safe distance to look at and analyze India and the Indians. They have used novel as a medium to express their philosophy of life and made it a representative for the nation. The image of a nation is created through the collective consciousness of its citizens. The novel as a form of literature tends to imagine India as a Nation and through its people, middle classes and their sensibilities. The most significant aspect of the Indian English novel of these novelists is that it conveys the solidarity of multicultural India, through characters, cosmopolitan authors and readers. The novel of the 1980s and 1990s presents the parallels between the life of the individual novelists and the history of India. In the modern and postmodern Western novel, there is a sense of despair and alienation. But in the Indian English novel there is a sense of affirmation of faith in the multi-cultural Indian identity. For this very reason there is an optative mood and nostalgia in the works of Rushdie and Mistry.

Although Salman Rushdie lives in a foreign land, he is a truly the novelist of India because he has presented a close observation of some important events that influenced and shaped Indian society. *Midnight's Children* (1980) is one of the famous postcolonial political Indian English novels that reflect an image of contemporary India. In this novel he presents social and political realities of India and comments on the socio-political issues of the Indian sub-continent. In his novels he has tried to define the idea of 'Indianness' and everything that is associated with it. In his work *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie expresses his views on India. He writes: "I come from Bombay, and from a Muslim family, too. 'My' India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity, to my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and the crowd by its very nature is superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once". (IHL: 32)

Shashi Tharoor also expresses similar view while

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talking about social and historical spaces. He writes:

“The idea of India is the idea of a land that is greater than the sum of its contradictions, a diverse society divided by caste, creed, cultures, cuisine, conviction, costume, and still united around a democratic consensus. We carry with us the weight of the past, and because we do not have a finely developed sense of historicism, it is a past that is still alive in our present. We wear the dust of history on our foreheads and the mud of the future on our feet.”² (Tharoor: 3.)

Although Bharati Mukherjee belonged to the dominant mainstream Hindu society, she did not wish to be a citizen of India. She wanted to escape from India. However, Rushdie and Mistry do not wish to cut off their umbilical cord with India. Though they reside in the Western countries, they become nostalgic and look back to India; they wish to belong to India. Salman Rushdie frequently goes down memory lane and tries to regain his past. He was born in India two months before India's independence from the British rule. He spent his formative years of life in Mumbai. He accompanied his family to Pakistan and then shifted to England and settled there. Though he became a British citizen, he cannot forget his Indian experiences in Mumbai. He says that he grew up in a Muslim family but was not brought up to think that he was part of a Muslim community which was separate from other communities. When he was in Pakistan he was asked how he could make use of Hindu culture. The answer to this question can be found in his novels in which he celebrates India's pluralism by saying that India is a plural country and one needs multiple resources to reflect it.

For Rushdie, India more than simply a geographical space; it's a home for him. It's a land of promise that occupies a space in his subconscious mind. In *Midnight's Children* there is an image of a plural India with her social and cultural diversities. Therefore, he pines for his lost homeland of India i.e. Mumbai. The metropolitan city of Mumbai (Bombay) is a miniature India for him and for Rohinton Mistry as well. Rushdie's creation of fictional, invisible or imaginary homelands is an attempt to compensate the loss of his Indian past. His desire to belong to India has given rise to the fictional 'Indias' of mind. For him 'Indianness' is a clean and an all-encompassing idea. However, he deplores that it has been corrupted by narrow parochial religious ideas of Hindu fundamentalists. In *Midnight's Children* an image of India emerges through his attempts at exploration of the meaning in India's history of the past century.

Midnight's Children is a political novel about struggle for India's struggle for independence, the partition of India and its terrible impact on the lives of people. It is also an assessment of Indian dream in the postcolonial period. The post-independence novels of R.K.Narayan (*Waiting for Mahatma*), Chaman Nahal (*Azadi*), Khuswant Singh (*A Train to Pakistan*), B. Rajan (*The Dark Dancer*), Manohar Malgaonkar (*Distant Drum* and *A Bend in the Ganges*), Attia Hussain (*Sunlight in a Broken Column*) and the prose writing of Collins and Lapierre (*Freedom at Midnight*) depict the India's struggle for freedom and the trauma of the partition. However, in *Midnight's Children* the novelist talks about the all-pervasive character those epoch-making events on the lives of all the citizens of India. The narrative covers a period of more than seven decades in the country's post-

independence history. It describes how the three generations of a Sinai family reacted to the events such as Indian independence, the horrors of the Partition and the consequent social displacement and loss of identity. The locale of the family goes on shifting from Srinagar to Amritsar, to Agra to Bombay and lastly to Karachi in Pakistan. Saleem Sinai is the narrator-protagonist of this novel. He works at a pickle factory during daytime and writes down his experiences at night. Through his writings of events and experiences he reveals the link between the public and private life of people of India. It is through the protagonist's consciousness the image of India is presented by the novelist. There is a description of the major events such as the Jallianwala Bag massacre, Quit India movement, Cabinet Mission, India's struggle for independence, the stance of Muslim League, communal violence, bloodsheds, independent India's Five-Year Plans, Formation of linguistic states, language conflicts, Chinese aggression, the Hazaratbal Mosque incident, the Pakistan War, the liberation of Bangladesh, the internal Emergency and a number of historical, social and political events.

In Rushdie's novel there is a spirit of enquiry or questioning. The novel is a criticism of failure of the Indian dream. Rushdie raises a question whether the first generation of free India really lived up to Nehru's hopes for the newly born nation-state or whether it wasted those opportunities. However, he looks at this problem in an objective manner. He expresses belief in India's inherent capacity to constantly regenerate itself but at the same time he feels sad and presents a gloomy and frustrating image of India prompted by certain unpleasant political developments. Rushdie paints India as affected by wars with Pakistan and feels that due to political problems created by manipulative leaders India has lost its promise. He looks at India as disintegrated into communal groups. He deplores the failure of the first generation or midnight children for their inability in finding any meaningful role. He deplores their failure to create secular and plural institutions that would preserve India's multiculturalism. *Midnight's Children* reveals the failure of Nehru's vision of multicultural, secular India. It shows how the country's children have fallen prey to imprisonment and mutilation; and how they have been deprived of Nehruvian hope and optimism. In this novel Rushdie portrays India as a fractured nation affected by religious fundamentalism, narrow parochialism, communalism, caste politics and corruption. It is described as place of traditional values affected by sectarian and communal violence, division and dissent, disorder, lawlessness, moral depravation, illusion religious fanaticism, and linguistic chauvinism and modernity. Rushdie fuses history and fiction to create an image of India and tries to link private life with public events in order to explore limited scope of individuality in the populous multi-cultural and multi-ethnic India. The image of India in this novel reveals his intention to narrate events from Indian history for critiquing predicament of Indian society. It realistically reveals life-like situations, the absurdities, pretentious conduct of people, and the provisional nature of truth. The image of India is reflected through themes, characters, their dialogues and statements that reflect feelings and ambience of Indian social structure. The use of

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the Indian English idiom and also several Indian words such as Gunda, Chup, Amma, Takht etc. have created an image of India. Rushdie projects the multi-cultural and pluralistic character of Indian nation through a multiple point of view.

Midnight's Children is parody of a national myth. He presents that parody through the technique of magic realism, and the opposition between national unification and fragmentation, between private and public, personal and trivial etc. Rushdie is a postmodernist diasporic novelist for whom migration is a process of rooting of multiple identities. This fragmentary reconstruction and narration of history gives rise to multiple images of India and Indianness so he fails to comprehend a distinction between the real and imagined nation. The novelist suggests that in the postmodern world the concept of nation is fluid as it has to face competing claims of many more realities. According to Shashi Tharoor after Nehru Indianness is reinvented by Rushdie. Rushdie has tried to present a dark side of it. He has converted history into a story. In an interview with Gauri Vishwanathan, Rushdie admits that his novel is a revolt against the earlier tradition of writing. In the Indian English novels written by other novelists there is an image of a rural India. They are about life in small towns in India but those novels did not depict his India.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) he again undertakes the critique of nationalist debate and postcolonial nationalist discourse. He presents his political vision of India and satirizes various interpretations of the concept of nation and nationalism. Rushdie celebrates cultural hybridity of India and ridicules efforts to impose a singular cultural interpretation of Indian nation and shows its aesthetic and political dimensions. He reaffirms his faith in the Nehruvian idea of a secular democratic pluralist India. The narrative of the novel touches the crisis of governance of the 1975–77 Emergency in a casual way and focuses on the ideological crises of the 1980s and 1990s. There is a strong condemnation of the religious fundamentalism as it has destroyed the much coveted myth of Indian nation. Rushdie's narrator Moraes (Moor) presents a pessimistic image of India after the destruction of Ayodhya Mosque in the year 1992 and the social disintegration of Bombay due to the emergence of the fundamental ideology. In *Moor's Last Sigh* Rushdie writes:

“The Barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. We were our own wooden horses, each one of us full of our doom. We were both the bombers and the bombs.” (MLS: 372)

Rushdie uses the first person plural pronoun 'We', and reminds all the Indians of their collective responsibility. He implicates all the people of India for nurturing anti-social and anti-human acts of segregation. *The Moor's Last Sigh* creates a pessimistic image of India. It portrays a conflict between pluralist secular and tolerant ordinary citizenry and an unchanging insensitive and intolerant political class. The novel also shows a struggle between a plentiful and plural Bombay of the novelist's childhood and the idea of Bombay (Mumbai) propagated by Shiv Sena in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In this novel Rushdie evokes an image of the composite culture of India and suggests that India is a mixture of so many cultures such as Hindu, Christian,

Muslim, Jewish etc. He is proud of India's plurality but is afraid that in coming decades this composite culture would come under threat and attacks by the growing fundamentalism of the Hindu majority. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* there is an optimistic picture of life. The young Haroun struggles to preserve the plural society but *The Moor's Last Sigh* presents a much gloomier picture of human civilization. It is not sure of peace and hope for equality. Rushdie evokes a frightening image of the country. The depiction of the contemporary political climate in India reflects his fear that in future decades the tolerance of cultural diversity in the country will be destroyed. Rushdie makes a prediction that like the Moor Boabdil's disappointment with life, the modern Indian moor will be disillusioned by the religious, cultural and political intolerance in India. He will be defeated and killed by the supporters of Hindu fundamentalism.

In this satirical and historical novel Rushdie projects an image of grown up nation. He wants India to cherish pluralism and multiplicity. For him India is so many things. He visualizes that India which is free from narrow religious fundamentalism. In spite of his feeling of disillusionment with the nation's journey in the post-Nehru period, Rushdie reaffirms his faith in plural India and her inherent capacity for regeneration. He fears that the nation's secular values and pluralism will be held hostage by the anarchic forces of fanaticism. In this sense *The Moor's Last Sigh* creates a pessimistic and apocalyptic vision of India. However, the narrative exhorts readers to care for preservation of moral fabric of our plural society. It makes an earnest appeal for tolerance and mutual understanding. It advises people to be tolerant enough to accommodate difference. It recommends peaceful co-existence with co-religionists. It also emphasizes a need for defending the composite culture of secular India from the anarchic and destructive forces of intolerance.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet is a fictional love story of a famous singer Vina Apsara and her musician lover Ormus Cama. This novel has a background of the cosmopolitan city of Bombay with its everyday life, its mores and manners. Bombay is a metaphor for an inclusive India. The novelist deplores the loss of spirit of sportsmanship of Bombay of 1950s and 1960s. He refers to the Quit India movement launched against the British in 1942 at the Gowlia Tank in Bombay and the consequent violence, demonstrations, lootings after Mahatma Gandhi's arrest. There is a criticism of the British policy of “Divide and Rule”. In this novel he describes the period of political uncertainty that existed at the time of Nehru's death. After his death there was a period of political crisis in India. The ruling Congress Party was being dominated by senior political aspirants and leaders such as L.B. Shastri, Morarji Desai, and Kamraj. The political forces like Bombay's Access i.e. Shiv Sena were about to gain control of Bombay. It was the period that saw the growth and spread of Hindu nationalism in the country. The decision of the government to deregulate the economy and removing the international tariff barriers are criticized by the novelist. He compares India's journey with a fast running national railway train without a driver. This description of chaotic conditions in India of 1980s and 1990s

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creates a blurred image of Indian nation. Rushdie refers to the event of changing the name of Bombay at the behest of Shiv Sena. He says that during those years when other parts of our country had come under attacks by communal forces but Bombay was free from violence and disorder. The people of Bombay were proud of good communal relations and social harmony.

Rushdie holds the government responsible for the rise of communal forces and political leaders for disturbing Bombay's peace and harmony. Rushdie refers to the infamous fodder scam and Laxmi Yadav's alleged involvement in it and many other matters of political corruption. He also refers to Sanjay Gandhi's project of Maruti car and the consequent scam of 1970s, the Swedish Cannons i.e. Bofors Guns scam of 1980s during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as the Prime Minister. In that international arms deal a large sum of public money or nation's resources were allegedly swindled by the political class and it tarnished the image of the India Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Rushdie further describes the stock exchange scam of 1990s committed by Harshad Mehta etc. All these references to the recent political past create an image of a politically corrupt India. He shows different reactions of the rural masses and the urban metropolitan elites from Bombay and Delhi to Bihar's then Chief Minister Laloo Prasad's scam. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* Rushdie comments on Mrs. Indira Gandhi's family affairs and Sanjay Gandhi's alleged dislike of her for abandoning his father Feroz Gandhi. The novel narrative also refers to the anti-Sikh riot of Delhi in the aftermath of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's murder by her Sikh bodyguards. In *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* there is a discussion of Indian national identity but in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) Rushdie presents a fluid image of India. He suggests that due to globalization nations and identities are constructed upon uncertain cultural grounds. In the postcolonial world it has given rise to a fluid, hybrid vision of contemporary life and a darker image of the fragmented, divisive nature of contemporary Indian politics. The process of globalization involves heterogeneous cultures and identities of the world. It also introduces dominating economic and cultural practices that are resisted by national and cultural organizations. There is a plethora of images, myths, stories, legends, films and history employed by Rushdie to refer to national self-perceptions. Globalization affects heterogeneity of cultures and subverts identities of the world. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* several characters leave India to invent new identities for themselves in various parts of the world. Every line of demarcation becomes unclear and the ground seems to be moving continuously beneath people's political, religious, social feet.

Rohinton Mistry is an expatriate/diasporic Indian English Parsi novelist who writes from Canada. In his fiction he writes about significant social and political events that occurred in the 1960s, 1970s and the period through the internal Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. His narrative covers the period from the 1960s to the contemporary India. In his short stories he writes about ordinary Parsis, their problems, their marginalization in the post-independent India. He criticizes the government for its

indifference to the masses and suggests that in this country only the wealthy and influential people can survive. He draws a realistic picture of angust-ridden middle and poor class Parsi people in Bombay. In his fictional world of India people clamour for justice, welfare, equality and opportunities. They are helpless victims of corruption, sufferings and marginalization. His fiction creates a dystopian vision of India. Mistry's novels focus on the post-Nehruvian era in the contemporary history of India. It marked the emergence dirty power-politics, favoritism, nepotism and corruption at all the levels of government and society. Mistry deplores the failure of Nehruvian dream of a multi-cultural, secular and democratic India. He suggests that even after the partition of India in 1947, the communal harmony of Bombay was intact but with the emergence of the right-wing party like Shiv Sena, the process of religious segregation set in. Its linguistic chauvinism made the linguistic minorities and people from other parts of India come to be regarded as the 'Other'. He shows the contemporary India affected by rail accidents, dubious custodial deaths, suicides due to poverty and privation. Through his stories and novels Mistry reveals the shadows of history and distinct outlines of contemporary Indian nation. He presents the socio-political reality of independent India during the turbulent period between India's two wars with Pakistan and China.

Such a Long Journey (1991), Mistry's first novel portrays Indian culture and family life setting it against the backdrop of the subcontinent's volatile postcolonial political background. The action takes place in 1971 in Bombay at the moment when war breaks out between India and Pakistan, for liberation of East Pakistan. Against his political background the troubled life of Gustad Noble and family is described. He is the undisputed protagonist of the novel. Mistry interweaves the important events in India with those in the private life of the Gustad's family and of the other characters in the novel.

It shows how the lives of the characters are profoundly influenced by political corruption and the government's failures obligations to its citizens. Mistry reveals the heterogeneous nature of the Indian community's identity in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Mistry's short stories and novels are deeply rooted in the political ambience of post-Independence India. His novels are a kind of fictional critique of significant political events that shaped the post-independent Indian nation. His novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) creates a cultural and political image of India. For Rohinton Mistry India is important as a subject matter. The city of Bombay occupies an important place in his narrative. It is a metaphor for multicultural India and a resource for his fiction. It is his birth place and also the home to the Parsi community. However, with the emergence of Shiv Sena Party in 1966 it began to feel extremely unsafe and insecure. According to Nilufer Bharucha all the non-Hindu religious and non-Marathi linguistic minorities began to feel threatened by this right-wing Hindu political party that demanded job reservations for Marathi people. It blamed the non-Marathi citizens for scarcity of jobs in Mumbai. Its racist stance created the feeling of 'Otherness' in the minds of Parsis, Muslims, and Tamils and people who had come to

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Bombay to earn their living. Its rhetoric 'Maharashtra for Marathi-speaking people' created fear in the minds of non-Maharashtrians. Mistry says that that formation of Indian national 'self' depends on a strategy of assigning a status of 'Other' to non-Hindus and it threatens to victimize the Parsis. Therefore, Mistry's characters in the novel dislike Shiv Sena and its programme against the non-Maharashtrians.

Mistry denounces Mrs. Indira Gandhi's politics but admires Nehru for his dream of a secular India. It is reflected in the thoughts of the protagonist Gustad Noble. He regards Nehru as "the country's beloved Panditji, everyone's Chacha Nehru, the unflinching humanist, great visionary" [SLJ: 11]. However, there is a bitter criticism of the abuses of power by the Congress government in the novel. He satirizes and accuses the corrupt politicians of abusing power. Mistry supports Indian intervention in the war on ethical grounds. All the characters experience food scarcity and rationing due to India's real war with Paistan. The dark windows of Gustad's house and air raid siren sounds indicate fear of attack by Pakistan. Gustad's conversation with his colleagues in the office shows his political consciousness and resistance by individual and society. The frequent references to the war and its immediate consequences play an important role in creating the background of the novel.

In Salman Rushdie's novels such as *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* he expresses his dissatisfaction with the course taken by the new modern Indian nation with its caste-ridden society but Rohinton Mistry's fiction criticizes the emergence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the imposition of internal Emergency under a pretext of a threat to the security of the Indian nation. In fact, the real threat was not to the Indian nation but to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Congress government. During the war of 1971 between India and Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, the country faced a major financial scam involving Mrs. Gandhi and the chief cashier of the State Bank of India. The novel presents a realistic picture of the minority community of the Parsi people, its fears, anxieties, and a sense of despair and helplessness. Mistry offers a commentary on the political uncertainties of the period. The novel creates a political image of India darkened by the infamous Nagarwala conspiracy case of 1971 in which the chief cashier Mr. Nagarwala of the State Bank of India, Parliament Street Branch was allegedly involved. It is said that he had complied with the orders from the highest authorities in power in India. Like the postcolonial writers Mistry offers his own version of history of people and tries to re-narrate a country and a community. Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* (1995) is about the India of the mid-1990s when the Indian nation suffered due to the internal Emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975. It was an arbitrary decision taken by her without consultation of her cabinet. The narrative describes in detail the traumatic years between the declaration of Emergency in 1975 and the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi's murder in 1984 by her Sikh bodyguard to avenge the death of the Sikh separatist religious leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the Indian Army's Operation Blue Star attack earlier that year on the holy shrine of Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab. The assassination of Indira Gandhi resulted in riots, communal violence, and murderous

attacks on the Sikhs by the Hindu mobs to avenge her death. Mistry has created pessimistic images of India in the novel. He has fictionalized the atrocities committed on the low caste or untouchable people during Emergency. The community of tanners or chamars of the rural India has suffered humiliation and the curse of untouchability for ages together. Mistry presents their sufferings, helplessness and humiliation of Buddhu's wife by the Zamindar's son for her refusal to accompany him to the field. The upper caste people shave her head off and strip her naked and parade her through the square. In another instance Dukhi's wife is raped in the orchard. A Bhangi (scavenger) shows courage to stare at a Brahmin and thereby violates the traditional code of behavior and invites wrath of the upper caste people. A chamar or tanner's act of walking in the vicinity of a place of worship provokes furore. Mistry presents the social reality through an incident when Ishvar and Narayan are denied access to school and right to education. They are mercilessly beaten for entering the class room. In another instance Narayan and his companions are hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree by the Thakur's men for exercising their right to vote in the election. There are several instances when the low caste rural persons are attacked by the established class in the villages. Mistry observes a gradual change in the aspirations of India's low caste people and the efforts of the upper castes to maintain their hold on the age-old established order. *A Fine Balance* fictionalizes the horrendous impact of the state of internal Emergency on Indians. It is a realistic record of abuse of power by the top political leaders, their election malpractices, misappropriation of power and public money. The novelist focuses on the nation-wide impact of those epoch-making events on the lives of the urban population as well as the poor, homeless rural migrants to the urban areas. It is a story of the life-struggles of four characters that happen to come together by chance and reside in the same poor apartment in Bombay. *A Fine Balance* presents a realistic portrait of the social order and its impact on the common people of the Indian nation. Mistry tries to depict the crisis of identity faced by the Parsi community in India. He shows the struggle of the Parsis to determine the cultural space and understand the meaning of their existence within the political and historical space of the postcolonial India. Because of their Persian ethnic origin they are looked upon as 'Other' or outsider. However, it is a fact that with some exceptions the Parsis have never been singled out or segregated by Indians since their arrival in India for their non-native ethnic origin. It was their affinity with the British rulers that prevented them from assimilation with the native Indians. As an ethnic minority in India and in the world at large, their minds are preoccupied with the feeling of 'Otherness'. They always feel 'Othered' and alienated in India and elsewhere. This problem is reflected through the image of Indian nation in Mistry's novels such as *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*.

In the traditional realist novel there is a celebration of the middle class bourgeois protagonist, his dominant culture and, his sense of 'home' and 'self'. But as a postcolonial novelist, Mistry rejects the worldview offered by the traditional realist novels and tries to present a new cultural reality of India. In his novels he presents the gradual

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evolution of Indian nation as an entity. He goes beyond the traditional bourgeois world view and involves the poor, underprivileged, working class people to form a comprehensive picture of life of Indian people. The Parsis and the ordinary working class people are the cultural 'Other' in his novels. For example, the novels deal with the tragic life and struggles of a Parsi widow, Dina Dalal, the miserable life of the lower caste tailors Ishwar Darji, his nephew Omprakash, and Maneck Kohlah from the foot hills of the Himalayas. All these characters live together in Bombay. The novel describes their plight, privation and poverty. While describing life in the urban centre like Bombay, Mistry takes the reader into the rural India where lower caste people suffer the oppressive caste-discrimination and marginalization. In his earlier novel *Such a Long Journey* Mistry dealt with the middle class Parsi life in Bombay but this novel deals with the unhappy and monotonous life of rural people in India. In an interview with Robert McLay he speaks about the social reality of India where seventy-five percent people. Mistry creates an ethical vision of India with its multicultural reality. He uses recent history to analyze the life of backward caste tailors and looks at their life from the perspectives of the Emergency period of 1975 and the assassination of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984. The technique of neo-realism is used by him to create an objective image of multicultural Indian nation. He exhorts the readers to break free from narrow personal considerations and adopt an ethical view to take cognizance of the reality of the existence of 'others'. There is a mixture of the characters' private lives and public history in the temporal and spatial arrangements of important events in their lives. The novelist focuses on the lives of the four main characters and their painful past. The narrative begins with the account of internal Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi on the nation and concludes with the assassination of Indira in 1984 in New Delhi. It gave rise to communal violence and caused massacres of Sikhs by Hindus after the assassination of their Mother Goddess i.e. Indira Gandhi. Mistry describes the miserable life of his characters without any sentimentalism or emotionalism. He rejects the official interpretation of the Indian history between the two decades of the 1970s and 80s and attempts to present a factual account of terror experienced by Indians during the Emergency. He feels that the dark side of that period has not been covered by the institutional texts of history.

Mistry's characters struggle against all the odds to resist History. They do not want to become its passive spectators. He ridicules Indira's image and recreates it to examine her political miscalculations. Mistry is extremely critical of all the political abuses that were committed during the period of internal Emergency. There is a clear and direct description of horrendous aspects of life of poverty, despair and violence. Mistry portrays a chaotic image of the nation of 1970s plagued by Emergency, the Family Planning Campaign, its forced sterilization, the imposition of the MISA i.e. Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and its draconic detention of opponents without trial, its media censorship, and imprisonment of intellectuals who opposed it. He ridicules the didactic slogans and speeches, the elimination of slum areas and the family planning clinics and

vans distributing free radios in exchange for a vasectomy or two that tarnished the image of India. He exposes the most frightening dimensions of the Emergency and the consequences experienced by his characters. Mistry denounces the political corruption indulged in by the Prime Minister who deceives in the parliamentary election in order to retain political power. He protests that the Prime Minister violates the sanctity of constitution of the country. He likens the Emergency with the myth of Kali Yuga or the end of the world. Mistry is critical of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's policies and authoritarianism, her government's corruption and indifference to sufferings of masses. In *Such a Long Journey* Mistry criticizes the hate-politics of Shiv Sena and its terror tactics. In *Family Matters* the collective fear of ethno-religious minorities is presented through the character of Hussain who is the unfortunate victim of the communal riots that erupted after the demolition of Babri Masjid. He is an ordinary peon at the Bombay Sporting Emporium. He is frustrated with his predicament because his wife and three sons are burnt to death in the riot.

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