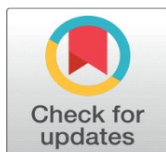


THE INFERENCES OF CULTURE AND TRADITION IN ROHINTON MISTRY'S A FINE BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

The realm of anthropological life is contingent on the diverse cryptographs of multifaceted civilization. The literary expositions have exerted on a cautious and conscious sweat to exhibit the tranquilities of cryptographs. The subjects like 'class', 'caste', 'custom', 'culture', 'identity', 'tradition', and 'heritage' have been bright enough to inhabit the crux of literary expressions. Authors from the past to the present have acknowledged intense subjects which facilitate to depict the animated, veiled and treacherous virtues of individuals in an unimaginable convention. It is pertinent to advocate the insight of society in the intellect of committed and fascinated writers. They have embarked on the life and lifestyle of people; who inhabited from nook and corner of the world with passable resolution in foreseeing the flavours, fortunes, and prosperities for the betterment of human existence.

Rohinton Mistry is an experiential fabric of intellectual spectrum to delineate the authenticities of Indian culture and tradition. His literary magnum opus *A Fine Balance* (1995) seizes the carnages and atrocities of emergency declared in India. It pictures the contemporary glitches of class and caste system. Even the issues like ragging and Parsi life are vibrantly visualised with ample scope. His stupendous conception of typoscripts has kindled the bibliophiles to endorse and encapsulate the exhortations of emergency and its consequences. The scorching complications like corruption, courage, vehemence, dignity, and decorum noticed in Indian city 'Bombay', now called "Mumbai" is typified in the novel. Hence, the research paper makes an unwavering attempt to shed light on the inferences of culture and tradition in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* within the contemporary framework.

Keywords: Class, Caste, Culture, Tradition, Inference, Balance, System, Emergency, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has boarded on the dreams, realities and hallucinations in ascertaining the life of human entities. It has provided a required impetus to catch up the ideals of human beings, and the society in particular. Transformations are always on the cards to display the optimistic and pessimistic sideways of lifespan. The observant authors have put across the intellectual forte to juxtapose the intense concepts and contexts. These are noticed in the different genres like poems, proses, essays, short stories, novels, dramas and criticisms. It is apparent on the part of bookworms to capture the essence and flavour of literary manuscripts in recognizing the tribulations of common folk. Nothing superficial can sustain for a longer period of time, unless it has the element to agree and disagree upon in the creative, imaginative and charismatic creation of intellectuals.

Rohinton Mistry is a versatile fascia witnessed in the evolution of twentieth century English literature. He is an Indian born insightful Canadian author with an inclination towards the disgraceful chunk of humanity. His literary strength has made him a recipient of prestigious awards. He is acclaimed with the flagships like 'Giller Award' and 'Neustadt International Award'. His initial three novels 'Such a Long Journey' (1991), 'A Fine Balance' (1995), and 'Family Matters' (2002) were short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize. Even he is measured as a pioneer of postcolonial literature in the contemporary circumstances. His literary lexes reside into cabinet the style, subtlety, reality, and emotions in profundity. Though his narratives apply the modest and translucent style, yet they reconnoitre the refrains which portray the condition of people both in time and space. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said asserts:

Postcolonial discourse points to the way in which cultural and ethnic identities of the non-white cultures are often the 'Other'... In addition to this, celebration of the middle-class bourgeois self, the traditional novel, in its heyday. (1994)

The term 'culture' is derived from the Latin root words 'cultus' and 'colere'. The word 'cultus' means 'care' - signifies a religious connotation; whereas 'colere' mean 'to till or worship'. In the same residue, the term 'tradition' is also extracted from the Latin root word 'traditio', which means 'to deliver or transmit or surrender'. The concept of culture and tradition are being treated as the two faces of same coin, which goes hand-in-hand together. The onus lies in the hands of both the author and reader to comprehend in the appropriate manner. The cultural and traditional principles cannot be identical in all the domains of human ambit. Every individual practice some culture and tradition bestowed by his ancestors to ascertain his status. But the concept of culture and tradition is not static; it keeps on transmuting as the civilization transforms at various echelons.

India is a multi-cultural, multi-traditional, multi-lingual, and multi-regional domain. It facilitates the writers to express their insight about culture and tradition. The bibliophiles get the opportunity to familiarize themselves about the strong culture and tradition practiced in the 'boiling pot' like India. Though culture is part and parcel of every society; yet India appears as the best place to look into the essence, flavour, aroma, beauty, sensitivity and intricacy involved in the practice. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is a literary treat to sense the existence of culture and tradition in the Indian society. Being an observant writer, Mistry has witnessed, visualized and presented the saga of culture and tradition to the core in the novel. He has not just committed himself to represent the brighter side; but also made a sincere attempt to highlight the darker side of multifaceted Indian society. In *Colonialism and Culture*, Nicholas B. Dirks points out:

Culture in India seems to have been principally defined by caste. It has always been seen as central in Indian history and as one of the major reasons why India has no history... It also defines the core of Indian tradition, and caste is today - the major threat to Indian Modernity. (1992)

Mistry's *A Fine Balance* revolves around four principal protagonists who hail from different backgrounds. It deals with an unspecified city of India and echoes the National Emergency declared in 1975. The novel not only touches upon the four characters, but also sightsee the carnages of caste structure rampant in India. Long descriptions in the novel disclose the early lives of leading roles. Indisputably, the novel is a realistic and undying epic with extremely enchanting settings, incidents, techniques, and literary rudiments. In a way, it is a fervent critique of the crooked and horrendous depiction of Indian social order perceived during the days of Internal Emergency. The chief protagonists like Dina Dalal, Ishwar Darji, Omprakash Darji, and Maneck Kohlah are typified as the victims of diverse places, but also from the epochs of equally terrible situations.

Every individual turns out to be a victim of irrepressible state of affairs in the passage of lifetime. The versatile characters discussed in the novel are observed as the victims of unavoidable situations. Dina, Ishwar, Omprakash, and Maneck are confined in the framework of their families and caste ridden assemblages. Each character is possessed with a different and momentous tale. The stories expose reasons why the three protagonists vacate their homes and decide to foldaway to Bombay with the intension of discovering newfangled life. Dina - a widow, with greater humanity welcomes the three protagonists and compels her older brother to make feasible provisions for their stay in the new abode. This act reflects the approach of people who comes forward willingly to assist others amidst their problems. It categorically exposes the culture and tradition of people who reside in difficulties.

The novel decisively canopies the days of Indian Independence to the days of emergency in India. These subjects have developed into deep and thought-provoking issues in determining the milieu of Indian humanity over the decades. It turns into an admirable exertion of Indian literature as its pacts with the quantity of universal themes. As the crux of the novel orbits around the matter of National Emergency, it sheds light on the condition of people who have evacuated

their homes. The picture of slum demolition, evacuation and lack of sanitary camps provides the condition of poor and downtrodden in the Indian society. The readers can easily comprehend the fear, ambiguity and uncertainty faced by the slum dwellers. Neither they are placed in a location to live, nor are they permitted to pass away. This condition of jeopardy has taught them a lesson which they would never forget in their lifetime.

The theme of class and caste offers a prospect for readers to understand the practice of untouchability through the characters of Ishwar and Omprakash. They agonize from the nuances of caste as they hail from cobbler community. Even they strained to change and involve themselves in the conventional profession. But the villagers set fire, destroyed and assailed. In addition, the modern-day societal hurdle ragging is perceived in the educational institutions. Maneck is a scholar who grieves at the indicators of his fellow seniors and peers. Even the clusters scuffle from calamitous poverty and human trafficking. They are strapped to mosey as mendicants in municipal provinces. This has provided a structure for the origin of beggar trade in the compassionate society. These traumatic conditions have forced them to experience suicide, corruption, and vulnerability at various stages of their endurance.

The fragrance of culture and tradition is epitomized in portraying the practices and customs of Parsis. They are the symbol of unity and harmony in the midst of upheavals experienced in Indian culture. The chief protagonist Dina - the offspring of a Parsi physician is the focus of tale. She ties knot with a virtuous pharmacist Rustom Dalal with the goalmouth of partaking comforts in future. Even she has the aspiration of becoming a physician like her father. But when her father passes away, her brother Nusswan has tumbledown her reverie of becoming a doctor. She is enforced to become the drudge of home. Unfortunately, on the third anniversary her husband lost breathes in an accident. She is unable to live with her brother because of his attitude of dictatorship. Then she moved back to the apartment of Rustom and involved herself in tailoring occupation.

Eventually her eyesight started to miscue the visual sense and forced her to hire two tailors. But she is obligated to hide tailors from the rent collector because the apartment is not meant to be used by others. Regrettably, she is ensnared by the rent collector, and loses both home and business. The tailors ended up homeless and turned into beggars. As a result, she is obliged to arrive at the house of her brother and lead a life of drudgery. Maneck gives up his dream and returned to his community after losing faith in urban culture, tradition and in the human race. Narayan and Ishwar are born and brought up in a community. They hail from a bottom Hindu caste, the Chammars. They occupy in leather labour and the people of high caste preyed on them. Later, they became tailors after their ancestors and the societal conditions propagated them to revolutionise in abolishing the system of class and caste.

They seriously exerted under the apprenticeship of Ashraf Chachain - a sympathetic Muslim tailor. This has facilitated them to get a profession in Bombay and turned into cloth merchants. On the contrary, Thakur Dharamsi - a strong upper caste village ruffian, and his assailants tortured and murdered the family of Narayan. In the company of Ashraf, Ishwar and Omprakash are able to safeguard their life. The boys in due course avoid the rebelling Hindus from harming the tailor. These incidents open up the eyes of intellect to understand the darker side of class, caste, culture and tradition prevalent in the multifaceted social structure like India. The mighty individuals always try to assert the dominance over the meek section in ascertaining the social, cultural, traditional, political, and financial status which would safeguard even the forthcoming cohorts of fraternity.

The novelist even portrays the image of corruption, filthy slums, extreme poverty, and political turbulence. India is a land of virtuous happenings, but the interference of greedy politicians has made the system corrupt. The declaration of emergency is an act of politics which helps to foresee the treachery of Indian politicians irrespective of the parties. Being a vigilant novelist, Mistry has made an intuitive effort to describe the after effects of emergency. Through his archetypal protagonists, he has thrown light on the predicament of common folk who struggle in different formulae. It is the destined responsibility of regime to protect and escalate the lives of public. But in certainty, the common folk strive to prove their existence without any succour from the sovereigns. The fight of Dina, Maneck, and Ishwar gives the superlative impression and illustration of misery without consolation from the potentates.

The real-life occurrences have made the archetypal characters to appear as the tragic figures. Despite their meticulous efforts to sustain life, they are projected as the persona of helplessness and hopelessness. There is only fear, misery, tension, ambiguity, and uncertainty experienced by them. The medium of love, comfort, serenity, sympathy, happiness, and contentment seems as a distant dream for the protagonists. Even the imposition of emergency has failed to advocate any positive vibration in the life of common people. Rather, it has created hazard and placed their life at risk. They are devoid of the basic amenities to crawl limbs in the critical and crucial hours of existence. Neither the system,

nor the sympathetic organizations come forward to rescue them in the time of dire needs. Prohibition is the only thing heard and experienced by the teenagers, adolescents, adults and old age people.

The episode of National Emergency sets the tone of narration in an emphatic manner. In a dictatorial attempt, the declared emergency is against the opposition and perverts the law to own advantage, rather making way for the good to exist. The meetings, processions and public assemblies are forbidden. In the designation of exterminating poverty and enhancing the city, the opponents are captivated without charge or trial. The poor are intimidated and enforced to undergo tubectomies and vasectomies in controlling the population. This is noticed when Omprakash and his uncle are forcibly sterilized in the time of return to their village for marriage. As a result, the people flee oppression in the villages and proceeded to cities for finding the luck or misfortune. In reality, the people did not leave village voluntarily; instead, the caste system drove the oppressed to urbanites.

The behaviour of upper castes is equated with the cruel and racist attitudes noticed in the American civilization. Lack of education, information, and knowledge are also the reasons for the catastrophe of poor and ostracised. Jealousy, hatredness, greediness, and selfishness are the genuine reasons noticed in achieving the colours of success. Many of the learned scholars have muted themselves or made to mute instead of rising their voice for the good of people and in particular, the society. The silence of Maneck or his stay at Dubai during the days of emergency exposes the attitude of known or learned intellectuals. But he is hysterical over the losses of friends and decides to return to the village. When he hears about the death of his father, he believes there is no motive to live and decides to commit suicide by jumping on to the fast-approaching train. In *The Fiction of Rohinton Mistry*, Novy Kapadiya writes:

The social tensions in the villages, the changing aspirations of the lower castes and caste-based violence, is so well delineated... woven into the flow of the narrative that it makes Rohinton Mistry a very astute political novelist. (1988)

The chief protagonist Dina continues to have an intimacy with the tailors and feeds them on humanitarian grounds. They lead a life of contentment recalling the good old days. She has slowly and steadily become the influencing person in the cluster. Though there are many difficult and challenging tasks, yet they are optimistic in their approach to witness the eradication of caste system in the cultural and traditional society of India. The concretised image of four characters has ignited the mind of readers to understand their unity even during the difficult situations. It delineates the most virtuous and abstract ornament of human beings called 'humanity'. The protagonists have been able to strike the balance of sustainability in the days of emergency to uphold the strength of people. It is resolute to note that people can endure misfortunes when they stand as united in the midst of ambiguities and uncertainties.

2. CONCLUSION

Before drawing the curtains down, it is hypothetical to advocate that Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is not mysterious. It has been fruitful in accomplishing the anticipated balance. The novelist has guaranteed the implication of striking balance in the much imbalanced and stereotypical social order. Though he has touched upon the subjects that are heart-breaking and heart-reckoning, yet his literary insights have elevated him to the extent of juxtaposing the hard-core veracities of Indian transience. His protagonists have been proficient enough to epitomize the inner voice of author in projecting the animated preachings of life. In cramming the inferences of culture and tradition, most of the times the construed theories of literature fall apart. As culture and tradition is a phenomenon of fluctuation, hitherto it is thought-provoking on the part of both the writer and reader to suppose the possessions as presumed.

As a consequence, it is convinced to admit that 'Bombay' is the best-chosen terminus to project the nuances of common folk. It is exclusively branded as the city of fortunes and misfortunes. All the typoscripts are closely associated with this fascinating urban domain in realizing the aftermath of casteism, corruption, and power mongers. There is a vibrant demarcation of classes like poor, middle, and the rich. It is appropriate to realize that these distinctions will endure as long as the people activate themselves to respect and admire each other. This appears as an easy mission, but quite often the easiest and modest tasks enforce people to endorse the selfish motives. Thus, in an expectant contour to assume that it might consume much time to grasp and grab the sense and sensibilities of ingrained people. In the progression of time, only the spirit of knowledge can affix the civilian subjects in the wall of fame.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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