



A FINE BALANCE BETWEEN HOPE & DESPAIR

IN

ROHINTON MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE*

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... You have to use your failures as stepping stones to success. You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair. In the end it's all a question of balance.

Rohiton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*

Rohiton Mistry is considered to be one of the foremost authors of Indian Heritage writing in English. His second novel *A Fine Balance* has received virtually unanimous praise. Dina Dalal is the protagonist of the novel her story is of the Indian women yearning for the almost impossible independence. Facing a life of misfortunes with dignity memories, the female character Dina Dalal leads a life finely balanced between hope and despair.

In fact, the conflict in the novel revolves around Dina Dalal, twice marginalized as a woman and a Parsi. Through a study of her character, we get to know the place of women in Parsi culture and in her struggle we see a woman's fight for her rightful place in the world at large. In living a life of her choice, she has to wage a lone battle for her personal as well economic independence. Hers is a small, subdued voice but heard strong to free herself of the shackles of male supremacy. Her life shows women in General and Parsi women in particular have a long way to go to proclaim them 'independent'. Dina struggles to defend her fragile independence from an autocratic brother as well as to protect herself from rapacious landlords.

Widowed at the age of 24, Dina Dalal is a lonely figure in the novel, estranged from her parental family and condemned to a monotonous existence. Her life has been a cyclic pattern which begins at her brother's house and after a brief spell of independence and happiness, ends with her accepting the emotional subjugation of patriarchy, Nusswan, her brother symbolizes. For Dina, it is hard to stomach Nusswan, obsessive of power and control, as a replacement to a warm and loving father. Her personal freedom gets restricted and Nusswan forces her to neglect school and burdens her with the entire household work. His personality is too weak to tolerate a teenager's harmless deviation from an adult norm "Dina's defiance, her stubbornness was driving him crazy" but he discloses the shortcoming of his own personality by establishing an authoritarian family regime based on surveillance. The little devils needs monitoring and corporal punishment his attempts to confirm the role of his father proves not only disruptive to the family but severely affects Dina's peace of mind. If he turns into a despot to compensate for his own shortcoming, it is Dina who is always at the receiving end of his whims. As a result her life becomes a nightmare in an autocratic system characterized by restriction and tyranny.

Dina gets obsessed with the idea of personal freedom because of the misery suffered under her brother's guardianship typical of the Parsi tradition. It is clear in the prologue of *A Fine Balance*, that Dina holds independence in high esteem. Talking about her tailoring business, which eventually sanctions her economic freedom she says: "No need to now to visit her brother and beg for next Month's rent. She took a deep breath once again, her Fragile independence was preserved" (Rohiton Mistry *A Fine Balance*).

For Dina, having to rely on Nusswan's money means losing her freedom; giving into her brother's rule equal giving up her independence. Therefore, her small tailoring business is not at least of all an attempt to escape the sphere of her brother's influence. Dina relies on male career patterns of entrepreneurship in order to leave behind a male sphere that prevents her from coming into her own as a modern woman.

In an act of rebellion against Nusswan's manipulative power, the young Dina falls in love with Rustum Dalal, a compounder, and marries him against the wishes of her class-conscious brother. Unfortunately, her happy married life with Rustum comes to an abrupt end when Rustum is killed in a cycle accident on the day of their wedding anniversary. Despite her brother's genuine offer of help, she decides to live by herself. Nusswan cannot understand her "strange idea of independence" working like a slave to earn a pittance even as a widow.

Dina fights for her independence and individuality but she faces the continuous Failures and threats by society. Finally she loses her flat and forced to her brother's home as a servant. Rohinton Mistry highlights crucial events in the country's chronicle by depicting the background of each protagonist. *A Fine Balance* illustrates the deeper insight of political, nativity and struggle of suffering people. It always focuses on the deep structure of the individual's existences of human life. *A Fine Balance* is taken up for analyzing the human sufferings in which Rohinton Mistry ultimately gives a space of endless sufferings of the individuals. Dina, chooses to be displaced her home, because she wants to assert her individuality and sense of self. She has grown up in Bombay, but her sense of independence after her husband's accidental death keeps her away from her family. She resolves to restructure her life without being economically dependent on a man. For her, life is a series of emotional upheavals and relocations of emotional bonds. Emergency made both Dina fails in her attempt. In the name of poverty alleviation and civic beautification, beggars are carried away and made to be slaves in labour camps.

Dina Dalal's new family creates an idyllic space where different cultures mingle and people of different classes transgress sanctioned spaces in symbiotic equations. Rohinton Mistry, the socio political novelist, emerges as a significant literary figure during the recent years. *A Fine Balance* has established him firmly as a significant literary figure in the Indian and Indo-Canadian traditions of fiction writing.

Dina is compelled by her landlord to vacate the premises on legal grounds that she is illegally carrying on the business and accommodating the tailors and the student as guest. Ultimately, left alone to carry on the burden of her life, she now is forced to take refuge at her brother Nusswan's, much against her will. Mistry's comment: "Independence came at a high price; a debt with a payment Schedule of hurt and regret. But the other option under Nusswan's thumb was inconceivable" (Rohiton Mistry *A Fine Balance*).

Dina Dalal finally finds refuge with her brother. Her story is the Indian woman's yearning for the almost impossible independence. Facing a life of misfortunes with dignity, refusing to give into debilitating memories, the female protagonist Dina finally leads a balance between hope and despair.

The narrative here highlights another perspective of Indian reality, gender discrimination and asserts that every aspect of society is 'gendered' conferring specific advantages to men and disadvantage to women. Women are relegated to a subordinate status in family and society. They are expected to be dutiful daughters, loving mothers, submissive daughters-in-law and faithful obedient wives. After marriage, women become and

property of their husbands, and if daughters are born, are ordered to discreetly get rid of the new born who gets strangled, poisoned or starved to death.

Dina Dalal, whose every effort is made to break her spirit, the story is one of gender oppression by a sexist male society. The recognition of women must be evident at every stage of the transitional process so that women can rebuild their lives with confidence.

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