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CITY BY THE SEA: ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

A Fine Balance, a novel by Rohinton Mistry portrays a variety of characters in terms of caste, religion, culture and locality. Ishvar and Om Daraji, born 'Chamaar' but tailors by profession, migrate to the 'City by the Sea' from 'Village by the River' because of caste and class oppression and for upward economic mobility. Maneck Kohtah switches from 'Mountains' to the 'City by the Sea' so as to acquire skills, which will lead to economic stability of his already declining family business. Member of an orthodox Parsi family, Dina Dalal, forms a love union that results in her economic, cultural as well as religious dislocation. The 'City by the Sea' provides space for heterogeneous mix of destiny governed puppets. In my paper I seek to portray the amalgamation of the characters of distinct religions, localities and cultures. This gives rise to the formation of varied cosmopolitanisms viz. economic, moral and historical. The novel is set against the backdrop of the 1975 Emergency. The political upheaval in India alters the effects of cosmopolitanism. I analyze the repercussions of that, as seen in the displacement of people in all ways.

KEY WORDS: Caste, economic up gradation and mobility, urbanization, displacement

DISCUSSION

A Fine Balance is a novel by Rohinton Mistry in which he has explored the effects of emergency laid in 1975 in India on lives of people in an unidentified city by the sea. He captures the shades of real India in his novel. Many of the economic aspects were covered in this story. Social, economic and moral cobwebs made the story very interesting. Characters migrated to urban areas from their villages mainly for economic up gradation and stability of finance.

Set against the backdrop of India's period of National Emergency of 1970s declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Mistry details how the emergency and the brutal tactics employed by the government affected the life of the poor and helpless citizens. Ultimately, the Emergency was not a different period for them, everyone was absorbed in his/her own struggles and the chaos of that period was just another hurdle for his/her daily sustenance. Here I propose to form a blend of characters of distinct religions, localities and culture. Further, this blend forms another blend of

economic, moral and historical influences on Indian society. They all combine which forms a new kind of cosmopolitanism. The aspects are describe as under -

1. Historical aspect which depicts the suppression.
2. Moral aspect that brings out the love for fellow human beings.
3. Economic aspect that brings geographically disparate and ethnic minorities together.
4. Political chaos that brings all the above aspects together.

As the backlash of the political upheaval, which brings historically suppressed, geographically disparate, and ethnic minorities together depicting their love for fellow human beings in their pursuit of economic upward mobility. I analyze its repercussions, as seen in the displacement and the newly formed alliance of a disparate set of people in all ways with economic perspective.

Marx and Engels tagged an ideological reflection of capitalism. The fundamental principle

of market capitalism diminishes the boundaries of caste-based and class-based society. This results in capitalist globalization, which is the cause of the misery of millions and, indeed, the cause of the very existence of the proletariat. Marx and Engels also hold that the proletariat in every country shares essential features and has common interests of upward economic mobility. Most famously, the Communist manifesto ends with the call, 'Proletarians of all countries unite! The casteless, classless society unites with the common interests of the proletariats, during political turmoil, implies a form of Cosmopolitanism of its own. This Marxist economic ideology works equally well in Indian sub-continent, which comprises of 'Mountains', 'Village by the River', and 'City by the Sea'. History of this land was coupled with the four-tier caste-based religion, which was later complicated by the assimilation of various other religions. Historical periods are classified according to the arrival of various religions, as seen in the Mughal era, which shows the influence of the Muslims on the Indian society. In the same respect, around 800 A.D. the Parsis, fleeing Iran due to the invasion of the Arabs, landed on the western coast of India in Gujarat. The displaced Parsi religion remained 'unhindered by the taboos of the Hindu caste system and the isolationism of the Muslims.

Fine Balance is "not a political story," and it's true that party politics are no more than a faint trumpet in the background. Dina, the tailors Om and Ishvar, and Maneck the student are too concerned with the strenuous business of scratching out a living to pay attention to the details. Yet because they live constantly on the edge of disaster; they are swept up in the consequences of Gandhi's actions, like twigs in the wake of a very large ship. Mistry would not describe it this way, but his decision to focus on these four people in it makes a kind of political statement, about caste and privilege. Inevitably, awful things happen to the four. Still, there are triumphs, too, such as when Dina, Om and Ishvar become an unlikely "family." Though Dina once considered the tailors untouchable, by the book's end she has served them off her own plates, shared memories with them, worried about their futures. Considering the way classism dividing the country, it is no small gesture. The human spark is not extinguished. They continue to find humor in their lives. This is an outstanding victory in their case. What's more, 'there are thousands and thousands of Ishvars and Oms in India today, people who keep going relentlessly in spite of the odds guided by the motive of upward economic mobility.

A Fine Balance is a monumental saga of struggle and survival, of hope and despair, of small

successes and mighty failures, and hopes which make people continuously move in life. It can also be read as a saga of the history of the Indian sub-continent from the Moghul period to the contemporary period of 1990s. Each character reveals the special time chain seen in the India of 1970s as the representative of the entire Indian history.

It's about Ishvar Darji, who is calm, compassionate, patient and responsible, and comes from a low-caste family of cobblers. The period of his stay in his village depicts various historical ages. His father Dukhi Darji was a cobbler by profession. The rigidity of the caste system that was followed depicts the pre-Moghul era of the Indian sub-continent. The 'village by the river' comprised three sections of the Brahmins, the landowners and the Chamaars. The function of the Chamaars was to obtain the carcass of the sick or otherwise dead animals. The Chamaars have created in them a classless society by giving equal opportunities to all its members. Every Chamaar is being assigned his turn and others do help him. Dukhi's words bring to light this system, "Who gets it if it dies? Is it your turn yet?" / "No, it is Bhola's turn... he will need my help". This depicts the economic morality of the classless Chamaar caste. Such economic system allows each Chamaar to exist and in turn helps his fellow caste-members to survive, thus creates a moral cosmopolitanism.

The birth of a son is taken very much care of while that of a girl is not. Three girls die due to some carelessness but the birth of Ishvar is taken very much care of. Also the influence of the Jagirdars and the Thakurs who not only exploit the poor economically but also physically marks this period, which we see in the twice beating of Dukhi Darji and rape of his wife Roopa just for few oranges.

His father, having suffered generations of upper-caste oppression, decides to send his sons to learn another trade, namely tailoring. Here we meet a benevolent Muslim in form of Ashraf who taught them tailoring. This depicts the presence of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent, which dates back to the days of the Moghul Empire. Also, we trace the transition of profession during this period in case of Ishvar and Narayan who were cobblers by birth but became tailors.

Once Dukhi went to the shop of Ashraf and saw some leaders of the Indian National Congress making speeches about the message of Mahatma Gandhi. Also the speeches were concerning the abolishment of untouchability in the Indian society. This period dates to the pre-colonial Indian struggle to gain independence not only from the clutches of the British but also from the

clutches of social evils. This period is marked by great upheaval in the Indian sub-continent.

While Ishvar stays back in the city, his brother Narayan comes back to the village to give back to the society he grew up in. Narayan desires to cast his vote in the election but lower caste people were not given the right to do so. This act of revolt is paid heavily by him, as it cost him his death at the hands of the Thakur. Dina Dalal, the struggling Parsi widow, rents out her flat to Maneck, and hires Ishvar and Om for her business. Losing her father at a young age and suffering under the strict rule of her elder brother, she breaks all family traditions to marry a person she loves, only to be widowed at a young age. Having none of the skills to make a decent earning in the city, and too much of self-respect to live with her well-off brother, she fights a never-ending battle of survival in the city. This talks of 1960s Women Liberation in India. Woman got the space to express her, marry the person of her choice and even stand alone in the society against all odds.

It is about Maneck Kolah, the young refrigeration and air-conditioning student who unwillingly leaves his small town in the mountains to study in the big city. His small town is shaken from its roots by big establishments and multinationals threatening to take it over and his father is unwilling to use hard-sell tactics to save their small soft-drink business. It's about his life in the big city, his horror of being ragged by his seniors, his decision to move out of the hostel, and ending up as a paying guest in a small apartment. The life of Maneck depicts the contemporary period of India when the airs of liberalization started to blow. It resulted in destroying many small-scale settled businesses. Four very unlikely characters try to shape their lives and their futures, and struggle for survival in the big city.

Dina Shroff, daughter of Dr. Shroff, wished to be a doctor like her father right from her childhood. Dr Shroff was to lead a campaign of medical graduates in some remote village for treating cholera and typhoid. He died during the campaign due to a cobra bite while working for the poor villagers. This concern to help the Poor and the suppressed is inherited in Dina also. Without the consent of her family members, she married Rustom Dalal, a pharmaceutical chemist. On their third anniversary, they invited her brother's family - Nusswan, Ruby his wife, and his children Xerxes and Zarir. Rustom didn't turn up in time as he went to bring some ice-cream 'She and her brother were searching for him when they found his 'twisted bicycle'. Here a dog was eating the ice cream, which the inspector kicked away 'The noble and benevolent heart of Dina cried, stop that! What harm is it doing to you? Let it eat!

After Rustom's death Dina became a tailor under the guidance of Rustom's surrogate parents to avoid having to move in with Nusswan. After twenty years her eyesight gave out from complicated embroidery and she was once again jobless. She eventually met a lady from a company called Au Revoir Exports - Mrs Gupta - who would buy ready-made dresses in patterns. She agrees to let Dina sew the patterns. But since Dina has very poor eyesight, she decides to hire tailors named Ishvar and Om. The three get along fairly well, but Omprakash is angry that Dina is a middle-person; he wants to sew for Au Revoir directly. She also decides to have a paying guest called Maneck to generate more income for her rent. Dina and the tailors' business runs fairly smoothly for almost a year, but effects of the Emergency bother them often. The shantytown where the tailors live is knocked down in a government "beautification" program, and the residents are uncompensated and forced to move into the streets. Later Ishvar and Om are rounded up by a police beggar raid and are sold to a labor camp. After two months in the camp, they bribe their way out with the help of the Beggar master, a kind of pimp for beggars. Ishvar and Om are lucky and Dina decides to let them stay with her. The tailors and Dina find trouble from the landlord, because she is not supposed to be running a business from her flat. She pretends that Ishvar is her husband and Om their son and also gets protection from the Beggar master.

It highlights the determination of a woman to remain financially independent after her husband Rustom Dalal's death. She represents the time period when female's labour force participation was very little in India. But she was one of the few women who showed the courage to initiate the movement of Woman Empowerment in India which is so talked about these days.

Even, in the end, when she is running short of resources, she "fed the cats, calling them by the names he (Maneck) had given them. Moral cosmopolitanism is in the utilitarian tradition, to demand better treatment of animals is what Dina depicts. It's not in the treatment of the animals alone but also with the humans 'Dina packs her left food, while going to her brother's house after Rustom's death, so that she can hand it over to the beggar.

Mistry forms the religious cosmopolitanism by introducing the Muslim character of Ashraf, who helps the low caste Hindus in learning the skills of tailoring. He not only teaches them tailoring but also provides them food, shelter and clothes without any material benefit. It illustrates the new kind of cosmopolitanism, in which the moral aspect takes more prominence than the economic one. During

the communal riots, Ishvar and Narayan not only save Ashrafchacha and Mumtazchachi but also save their tailoring shop by renaming it as "Krishna Tailors". They all, combined represent moral cosmopolitan characters who regard all humans as 'brothers' and provide tutelage of various sorts.

Ishvar and Om Daraji, born .chamaar, but tailors by profession, migrate to the 'city by the sea' from 'Village by the River, because of caste and class oppression and for upward economic mobility. Here they met Nawaz for shelter who offered them the "pavements" at the back of his house. Residing here for four months and doing some part-time jobs like working as a cobbler or two-days tailoring job at Advanced Tailoring, they are mostly unemployed. At their efforts seem to be futile for their upward economic mobility except the offer from Dina Dalal. In such a huge 'city by the Sea' we find people professing many different professions. Apart from the tailors we meet the hair collector, Rajaram and the Monkey man who are the proletariats of the economic cosmopolitanism. The tailors too join it by coming to the shacks'

The 'city by the sea' provides space for heterogeneous mix of destiny Governed puppets. Mistry introduces Shorab uncle, Shirin aunty, the night watchman, Shankar, Beggar master, Ibrahim, Masons, group of entertainers' etc. as the puppets struggling in the race for the upward economic mobility. Dina Dalal's hiring of the tailors and renting the house to Maneck incorporates her and the tailors in the same struggling race. The act of 'flattening the rows of flimsy shacks' takes the tailors to a number of lodges but in vain due to the heavy rent charges. Finally they come and meet the night watchman who charges three rupees per night for both of them. For the first time in the novel, we meet few working class men who have united for their economic growth, which includes the tailors, Dina Dalal, and the night watchman. Later, when the tailors' mistaken as beggars are taken to the site of irrigation project, they are joined by Shankar the beggar, the group of masons, entertainers, metal collector, ragpicker etc. This forms a cosmopolitanism of its own'

The Beggar master rescues Shankar because he earned him (the Beggar master) the highest profits. Beggar master being rational and governed by basic principle of self interest pays for the highest productivity of Shankar. He even rescues the tailors and saves Dina Dalal's house from the rent collector for fixed weekly amount considering it as economic opportunity. During their absence, Dina herself starts to stitch the dresses, in which she is helped by Maneck, thus becoming a part of the proletariats. Dina allows the

tailors to reside in her house, do household chores and even provide food for them so as to improve her economic condition. All the efforts of these proletariats are for creating a fine balance of their fiscal condition.

The struggle and the story of the characters take a twist. Ishvar's decision to get Om married heralds the beginning of the downward economic mobility. In the town, they are caught by the man of Dharamsi, the district in-charge of Family Planning, and taken to Nussbandhi Mela. Here Ishvar pleads to exclude Om so that he can have children who will be helpful to continue his progeny and earn for him in his old age. It's not only the nussbandhi of Om that occurs but he is even castrated. Also Ishvar loses his leg during this mishap. In such a situation Ishvar cries, "Is it a sin to visit my native place?" Really, it is, as they are displaced from their Homeland, their original profession as chamaars and also from the City by the Sea as tailors. The spark of economic up-growth is still not extinguished in the tailors who start begging. They are trying to put their foot in the shoe of Shankar, who once told them, "See, it's easy once you learn to balance it". These results in stagnation of their economic mobility which will also affect Dina.

In times of emergency, Govt. worked indifferently and just wanted to achieve its target. Sterilizations operations were undertaken due to economic burden created by population on the resources. Ishvar and Om's vasectomy operations were the case of rich and upper class's exploitation of lower caste and poor. After they became disabled, Dina was forced to close her sewing business. She lost her independence and was forced to live with her brother Nuswan. Ishvar and Om reduced to baggers. Later Ishvar and Om are rounded up by a police beggar raid and are sold to a labor camp. After two months in the camp, they bribe their way out with the help of the Beggar master, a kind of pimp for beggars. Ishvar and Om are lucky and Dina decides to let them stay with her. The tailors and Dina find trouble from the landlord, because she is not supposed to be running a business from her flat. She pretends that Ishvar is her husband and Om their son and also gets protection from the Beggar master.

Apart from this, the murder of the Beggar master by the monkey man, for snatching his livelihood by adopting the children he used for entertaining others, also resulted in Dina's economic dependence on her brother. They are not able to protract A FINE BALANCE of their economic up-growth. Ironically, Maneck attains economic progress from the job in Dubai but he loses other concerns. His cry is the cry of every universal cosmopolitan who progresses. He utters

his cry in a leveled voice, "You sent me way, you and Daddy. And then I couldn't come back. You lost me, and I lost everything. Whether it be the caste converted tailors or the struggling parsi widow, all are echoed in the above cry.

CONCLUSION

Seemed quite ironical here: Instead of advancement in standard of living with urbanization, acquiring skills all characters experienced poverty. Mistry portrayed capitalist society with characters like Nuswan and

Mrs. Gupta. Colours of caste and creed were more strong and above human relationships except in few characters. Rich becomes richer and poor becomes poorer without trickledown effect of development and urbanization, Success is no longer even available with struggle.

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