

# Quest for Identity in Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance

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### Abstract

*Rohinton Mistry was one of the famous novelists in Indian English Literature. The title "A Fine Balance" that Rohinton Mistry chose for his second book expressed, whether intentionally or not, his whole attitude towards the literary world. The distinguishing feature of Mistry's humanism is the desire for societal harmony to prevail via the affirmation of individuality and the guarantee of one's own existence. The four main protagonists in *The Search for Identity* come from diverse backgrounds, yet they work together as a cohesive unit because they all seek to establish their place in society. It is clear from the book that Rohinton Mistry did a good job of expressing his strong feelings of homecoming. Emigrant writers often feel a sense of loss due to the social and cultural nostalgia that accompanies their work. Many of these themes, such as homelessness, separation, multiple migrations, and identity, are inherently precarious due to their relation to and construction within specific socio-cultural contexts. The characters' aspirations and objectives are entangled with both optimism and pessimism on the present state of the world. In his writings, Mistry captures the universal humanist and realist conflict that most individuals experience. The primary objective of this article is to portray the contemporary issues faced by the characters.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Loneliness, Parsi, Rootlessness, Struggle for Survival, Marginalization.

### Introduction

Rohinton Mistry's upbringing and college years were spent in Bombay, India, where he was born in 1952. He moved to Canada in 1975 and enrolled in a Philosophy and English course at the University of Toronto. The American writer Mistry is of Parsi descent. His work has greatly enriched the field of Diaspora literature. The everyday lives of the Indian Parsis, who were known as "Persians" and are believed to be descended from Persian Zoroastrians, have been explored by Mistry. The Parsis, or Parsees, are a religious sect in Iran that adheres strictly to the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster. Three novels and a collection of short tales have been written by him. Among the many accolades bestowed upon his second book, "A Fine Balance," were the following: the Irish Times International Fiction Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book. The 1995 publication of his book *A Fine Balance* was by McClelland and Stewart. Four distinct characters from different origins are the subject of this novel set in "an unidentified city" in India, spanning 1975 and 1984, respectively, under the backdrop of

The Emergency. During the story, the four characters go through both moments. Maneck is very desperate with his life in India, which was very miserable for the 1970s. Diana, on the other hand is suspicious and lonely, but over time she learns to trust her friends and the people who want to help her, finding a balance. Ishvar and Om meanwhile are a contrast between optimism and despair. Ishvar is an optimistic man even in his worst moments, while Om is the opposite. He is distrustful and impulsive, between the two they find a balance.

### **Identity Crisis**

The topic of identity crisis has been explored by several authors in Indian English literature throughout history. This topic has been extensively explored in English literature by authors from the Indian diaspora. Theorist Eriksson first used the phrase “identity crisis” to describe a period when a person questions their own self-perception and conducts an introspective examination of their own identity. This is a topic that has been tackled by several writers throughout time. Authors like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, and Mulkraj Anand have done a lot of work with the subject of identity crisis in Indian English literature. They have looked in to this theme in terms of social, economic and cultural backgrounds through the protagonists of their novels.

### **Characterization**

In order to build a new universe and achieve freedom, the protagonists in Rohinton Mistry’s works learn self-awareness and struggle against hostile societal environments. His protagonists range in age from young to middle-aged. In his work, the heroines are the oppressed and the underdogs, and he addresses the big societal issues and inequities in Indian society.

### **Dina Dalal**

This novel’s protagonists were Dina Dalal. Affluent was Dina’s family name. Her mother withdrew and became unable to care for Dina after her father’s passing. Thus, Dina’s older brother Nusswan was entrusted with the task. Dina was wed to Rustum Dalal. After three blissful years of marriage, Rustum tragically passed away on their third anniversary after being struck by a vehicle while riding his bicycle. Dina and Rustum were married for a long time. Twenty years later, her vision failed her due to intricate stitching, and she found herself jobless once again.

### **Maneck**

Born to Mr. and Mrs. Kohlah, Maneck came into this world in a little mountain village. The grocery shop had been passed down through the centuries, and his father was the owner. Maneck resides in the student housing while he is a college student. Avinash, the student president, who shows him how to clear his room of pests. Avinash was among the political activists in India who had to go into hiding after the country’s emergency was imposed. Following an embarrassing ragging session by his fellow hostel students, Maneck moves in with Dina Dalal, thanks to his mother’s arrangements for a new living situation.

### **Ishvar and Omprakash**

A member of the historically untouchable chammar caste, Ishvar and Omprakash’s family cures leather. Myshvar and Narayan’s father, a Muslim, sent them to a neighbouring town to apprentice with a tailor named Ashraf Chacha so that they may escape the rigid caste system. Omprakash, Narayan’s son, and Ishvar go to Bombay in search of employment opportunities, which had been unavailable in their home town due to the opening of a pre-made garment store.

### **Quest for Identity in Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance**

Rohinton Mistry's "A Fine Balance" is his third book overall and second novel following "Tales from Ferozsha Baag," a collection of short stories, and "Such a Long Journey," his first novel. The ethnocentric short tales in Bombay's Parsi Zoroastrian culture chronicled the idiosyncrasies of a tiny minority group. To defend her faltering administration from the ever-increasing assaults of the opposition parties in 1975, Indira Gandhi established an internal emergency, which has since been extended. During the Emergency, the constitutionally protected rights of all Indian citizens were temporarily or permanently banned.

The novel opens with the prologue set in 1975 which marks the coming together of the chammar turned tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash with Maneck Kohlah in a computer train in Bombay, the city by the sea. For Maneck she who promises shelter from the horrors of the college hostel. This refuge motif however becomes ironical as the narrative progress and Dina is revealed to be in as much need of succor as the three men who seek her.

Diana who is already well into her middle age, although still attractive. After failing her eyesight she is unable to cope with the sewing orders from the export house and desperately needs the tailors and also the little more money that Maneck's rent wound bring in. The Search for the individual identity is forcibly and vociferously advocated by the modern militarism, racial bigotry, castism, class war, economic and political debates, cultural anarchy and gender bias.

Mistry tries to bring out the tragic life history of the untouchable like Ishvar Darjee and Omprakash Darjee. Upper class people are unable to see the pain of the lower caste people. They are in fact, led a miserable life throughout their lives. The two rural untouchables from the class of tanners struggled hard to rise above the social status by becoming tailors. But, emergency, religion and our own human community blocked their progress and dashed their efforts to become men of social approval and recognition. At the family, planning camp, Ishvar and Omprakash is castrated by the order of Thakur Dharamsi. The effects of sterilization and castration Ishvar has lost his legs and Omprakash has become very chubby. The other two protagonists, namely Diana Dalal and Maneck Kohlah lost their individual identity.

Emergency rules affect not only Ishvar and Omprakash's future but also affects the life of Diana Dalal and Maneck Kohlah. Most of the characters in the novel are affected by emergency expect few like Mrs. Gupta, owner of Exports Company and Nusswan, Diana's brother whose vision of emergency is totally different from the ordinary people. To them, the emergency is "A true spirit of Renaissance," and the prime minister is the "Visionary Leader."

In the globalization scenario, appearances of the people have been changed, political setup has been changed but the mindsets and attitudes of the people have not been changed. They remain stand still when it comes to the terms of castes and oppressions. Thus, the democracy is still a mirage to the subalterns. Because of the emergency which is announced by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, every one of the Indian society has lost their individuality and even so many have lost their wonderful lives also. It has affected drastically the lives of the poor people and their lives have become worst than before. It remains the garbage called "Discrimination" from the society we can form a society free from all kinds of oppression.

### **Critics View**

Many critics says that most of the incidents described by him in the novel are based on reality. His fiction is an authentic portrayed of contemporary society, politics and history. This is how his fiction turns out to be fact in the true sense of the term.

Mystery deftly uses the narrative device of unfolding events and the perusal of newspaper accounts of events that have already occurred. The narrative method of news items focuses on

facts; there should be no commentary. As the story “The Shadow Lines” demonstrates, the story’s presentation of raw, unfiltered truth heightens the event’s terrible impact.- by Amitav Ghosh.

Mr. Vasantro Valmik, “As the novel’s proof reader demonstrates, adapting to change and embracing it is the key to survival.” Failures may be seen as stepping stones to success, helping one to maintain a delicate balance between optimism and despair.

In *A Fine Balance* it is the element of subaltern activity, of political agency, the quest for identity that is constantly kept of bay. -Pierre Macherey

## Conclusion

In his books, Mistry shows how he feels about Indianism through the people he writes about and the events that happen. His writings evoke a strong affinity for India and Indianism, despite the fact that he is a Canadian author. *A Fine Balance* manages to strike this equilibrium between the universal and the individual, which is rare for Indian novels written in English. Everyone in the story has their share of hardships, and it’s hard to choose a favourite among the main characters since they all endure it. Each character amazes value before others. So, the identity crisis that the major characters and relieved from their sufferings but it is not so. Their search for identity is forever and ever.

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