



Vulnerability of Disabled bodies as Societal Issues in *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry

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Abstract— Rohinton Mistry was a Parsi writer who depicted the lives and struggles of common man between 1947 – 1984. In his work he portrays about the reality of India aftermath independence. Most of his works such as ‘*A fine Balance*’, ‘*Such a long journey*’, ‘*Family Matters*’, ‘*The Tale of Firozsha Baag*’, has a deep message related to socio-political and cultural realities of India. Major themes include: social inequality, caste system, political oppression, corruption, exile, migration, human resilience, silence, dignity, urban life, poverty, identity, cruelty and communal riots.

Keywords— Identity of the disabled humans, congenital defects, disfigurement, death, uncertainty, suicide, poverty and human sufferings.



INTRODUCTION

In Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), citizens with congenital defects, paupers, street players, people with major defects are portrayed to be heroes. The author has given special attention. The author weaves the lives of the poor of India as socio-problem. They are always showcased with much dignity and complexity, challenging social stereotypes exposed to the harsh realities of life in post emergency period. Through them, Mistry interrogates how physical disfigurement or disability intersects with class, caste, state violence, rendering with identity plying to their sufferings and resistance. The identity of the crippled, crooked were unnoticed. Shankar, Beggar master, Nosey, Rajaram, Ishvar Darji, Om Darji, Monkey-man and his companions Laila, Majnoo and the Mongrel are peripheral and central to the narrative and a victim of systematic inequality, bodily autonomy and human dignity. The poor and the needy always suffer when the government impose emergency, rules or regulations.

Characters like Shankar and Beggar master were acting as a saviour for the rest of the beggars in the

society. They embody the exploitation and resilience within the brutal society. Shankar despite being a limbless man supports the other marginalised individuals and has a deeper bond with Om and Ishvar. There is always a fine balance between despair and hope. In the end Shankar is murdered and a huge crowd followed him during his funeral. The highlighting point in the novel is when Dina Bhai and Maneck attends the ceremony this incident shows their bond and unity with this disabled man. The disabled and disfigured are considered as human for a common man whereas the same group is treated worse than animals by the powerful politicians and the higher authorities. (Mistry, 1995, p224-226)

The Intersection of Disability and Caste

Ishvar and Om from a lower caste who are considered as untouchables leave their village and move to the city in search of job and for betterment of self but unfortunately, they become a prey of dehumanisation. The journey of luck and betterment of the future turns into a real nightmare for them. They were stopped by systematic barriers and prejudices. In caste hierarchy an individual's identity is known by their profession therefore, Dhuki

Mochi changes his son's profession by making them as tailors for their well-being so they come to Bombay city in search of job finally they end up being homeless. A paradigm shift takes place from being a cobbler to tailor and then joins the beggar community ultimately ending up as a beggar and limbless bodies. These two characters are marred with unpredictability and bereft of social, economic and political society.

State Violence and Bodily Autonomy

National emergency period for twenty-one months caused a turmoil to the lives of the poor and marginalised souls. The fundamental rights of the people were denied and family planning schemes were made compulsory; sterilized people were awarded with gifts. Emergency embodied wicked Thakur Dhamarsi to enjoy power. Another highlighting issue is the city beautification and evacuation drive during Emergency. Thousands of slums comprising of shacks and shanties were destroyed befooling the slum dwellers. If they impose emergency then the government should have prepared other alternatives but they never thought about the well-beings of common and disable people.

Resilience Amidst Oppression

Despite the severe adversities they face, Ishvar and Om exhibits remarkable resilience. Their ability to adapt, maintain a sense of humour and to continue their craft as tailors in the face of physical and emotional trauma speaks about human endurance. Mistry portrays their resilience not as a mere survival mechanism but as a form of resistance against all kind of evil forces and harsh realities.

Shankar (Worm): The Dehumanization of Disability

Shankar also known as Worm is a limbless beggar has been mutilated to enhance his begging efficiency. His condition is a direct result of the Beggar Master's cruel practices highlighting how disability is imposed upon individuals for the purpose of exploitation. We see him as a good human who willingly help Om and Ishvar who was caught in the construction site. Though Shankar seems to be the half-brother of The Beggar Master but still he is helpless yet, he retains a sense of identity and humanity challenging the notion that disability equates to worthlessness. His disabled body becomes a tool for survival in a hostile environment.

Beggar Master: The Exploiter of Disabled Bodies

The Beggar Master is a hero-like figure for some beggars who also profits from the exploitation of disabled beggars. In the novel we find him levy charges of twenty-five rupees per week from Om and Ishvar once they are out of the camp. He even helps Dian Bhai from the wicked

hands of the goondas. The abled and the disabled were segregated in the construction site, there only hero was the beggar master. He controls a group of mutilated individuals including Shankar forcing him to collect alms on his behalf. His actions reflect a systematic abuse where disabled bodies are commodified for economic gain. In the end Shankar has been murdered by the monkey-man for abusing his nephew. Once a saviour now ended as a Martyr. It illustrates how societal structures can perpetuate the vulnerability of disabled individuals using them as a mere instrument of profit.

Nosey: The Legacy of Exploitation

Nosey is the mother of Shankar who has no nose that's why people call her as 'Nosey'. She was sexually abused by Shankar's father at first, she hesitated to it later she got used to the abuse. Due to this form of abuse another creature was formed therefore, the legacy of sufferings was passed down to Shankar who also turned into a limbless human. The novel shows the systematic oppression that perpetuated across generations. Her tragic fate exemplifies the generational cycle of exploitation faced by the disabled individuals in the novel.

Monkey-man: The Psychological Toll of Disability

Monkey-man, a street performer, experiences a heavy toll of disability when his monkeys are eaten by his dog. In this scenario we find both human and his animal friend suffer of terrible exploitation. Later the street performer is entitled to perform a show with his sister's children in the construction site. His actions, including the killing of the Beggar master reflects the deep emotional and psychological impact of losing companions and the sense of purpose that disability can create. The story tells how the loss of supportive relationships can exacerbate the vulnerabilities of disabled and violent outbursts.

Dog the symbol of Betrayal

Dogs are meant to be the best companion for humans. the dog was monkey-man's friend once when it was left alone in the stacks it ate the monkeys due to severe hunger and starvation though it was not its fault. Its death at the hands of the monkey-man reflects the cycle of nature of violence and negligence that affect the disabled bodies leading to the sense of loss and disillusionment. When he loses the animals, he started using his innocent children as a tool for his living. The animals and the little innocent children show exploitation within their beggar group. Innocent children are susceptible to manipulation and are controlled by those who are in power. The novel has a good vicinity showing how animals and small innocent children are being exploited.

Laila and Majnoo: The voiceless creatures

The death of the animals talks about the failure, care and ignorance by its owner. The story serves as a poignant reminder of the need for care, protection and support for the disabled and voiceless creatures.

CONCLUSION

Through these characters, *A Fine Balance* presents disability not just as a physical or mental condition but as a reflection of how society treats those it considers 'less than whole'. The novel criticizes social, political and economic systems that dehumanize, marginalize and exploit disabled people through the violence of forced sterilization, the cruelty of displacement or quiet neglect of mental illness. Mistry portrays a world that is profoundly unjust to its most vulnerable beings.

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