



HISTORICAL ISSUES IN A FINE BALANCE

English

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ABSTRACT

Literature reflects the social conditions and the historical evaluation of the society. In a perilous enterprise, one does not discuss causes are motives. One is either a fighter or a deserter. In the Centre of Canadian life is a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original grows. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an answerable denial of those values that Joshua Marsden calls the "shutting out of the whole moral creation in the loneliness of the forests". An immigrant to Canada, even though westernized, has a painful experience.

KEYWORDS

Immensely, Palmists, Grandeur, British colonization, Protagonists.

INTRODUCTION:

India had been a British colony for many years, but in 1946, after Indian nationalists had long fought for a sovereign state, British officials decided they would grant India independence if its leaders could agree upon a form of government. The new Congress Party and the Muslim League could not agree, and Hindus erupted throughout the country. Indian and British officials agree upon a solution to the bloody quarrel: They would partition India into two separate nations-India and Pakistan.

NOVELS HISTORY OF A FINE BALANCE

The term history, in the narrow sense, is the science of the human past. In the wider sense, it studies the development of the earth, of the heavens and of species, as well as of civilizations; it is often used to designate the sum total of human activities in the past. A more common usage looks upon history as the record of the events rather than the events themselves. In this latter and objective sense, history is "all we know about everything man has ever done or thought or hoped or felt" However if subjectively contemplated, history may be regarded as a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness.

HISTORICAL VIEWS

Atwood comments that the north is always at the back of minds of the Canadians and "Turning to face north we enter our unconscious. Always in retrospect, the journey north has quality of dream." (49) The wilderness both attracts and frightens. Gabrielle Roy calls it 'pure terrible country.' A look into the Canadian past establishes the fact that Canadians themselves suffer a "colonial cringe" and are terrified within their own country. Also, Indian immigrants to new lands face similar crisis not by chance but due to their legacy from the days of the British raj. The immigrant experience is neither nor Canadian, rather it is universal. Their country their native culture comes into conflict with the foreign culture. The traditional norms are censored and rejudged in the light of their puzzling alien environment. According to Matthew Arnold, they are "wandering between two worlds, the one dead other powerless to be born".

In search of peace, she travels to Varanasi, Haridwar, Kalighat, and Rishikesh. She also seeks the help of palmists, who offer her cosmic consolations, but ends up in buying a trip back to Canada; she is not aware where the voyage will take her, and where it will end.

On August 15th, 1947, the day after Pakistan achieved independence, India became an independent nation too. Jawaharlal Nehru served as the newly independent state's first Prime Minister. His inaugural speech, delivered at the stroke of midnight on the 15th of August, 1947, pointed to India's long history of ups and downs.

"At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her successes and failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her

strength.

We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again".

THE PARTITION OF 1947

Although the doing of the people in power, all the events narrated above have had a considerable impact on ordinary citizens such as the protagonists of this novel. After India's gaining independence in 1947 the majority of Indians rejoiced at the departure of the British colonization suffered immensely at the departure of the colonizers and complained that the latter had left too early. Instead of trying to cope with their new status with in post colonial India most of them chose to celebrate the past and long for it. This is what Maneck's parents used to do during their gatherings with friends, while of course, following British fashions.

"Consolation, as always was found in muddled criticism of the colonizers

Who, lacking the stomach for prop, had departed in a hurry, though

The post-mortem was tempo 9] [pered by nostalgia for the old days" (Mistry 209)

The State of Emergency

The second historical event, the State of Emergency, has an overwhelming presence in the novel and devastating consequences for the existence of many characters. Ishvar Omprakash are probably the ones who suffer the most. In the name of the so-called 'beautification programme their shack in the 'Jhopadpatti' 2 is destroyed by bulldozers, they are not allowed to sleep in the way pavement and they are taken by force to a work camp where conditions are almost unbearable for any human being. In this context the slogan of the government. "The nation is on the move!" (Mistry, 303)

Not only the very poor are powerless in the face of the Emergency. Maneck loses the only friend he had managed to make at college-the Students Union leader, Avinash, who is tortured to death by the police for speaking against government measures. It is again ironical that Avinash is the one who introduces Maneck to the game of chess. The use of chess as a metaphor for life fits on several levels and Avinash tries to use chess to teach the naïve country boy about life; not very successfully apparently. The chessmen are divided in function, pyramid style, like the structure of a society. At the top are the king and queen, who are protected and insulated by the various layers of defense below them; rooks, bishops, knights. The major and most dispensable layer consists of the identical pawns. Because they have no individual identities, these pawns are easily expandable. India's pawns are the poor, like Avinash, the homeless, like Ishvar and Om, all of whom exist at the bottom of the social pyramid. Unfortunately the reader discovers that rich people do not make any effort to understand the drama of these individuals. An example would be the attitude expressed by Nusswan and Mrs. Gupta of Au Revoir Exports. Dina's

brother is supportive of government measures considering that:

“People sleeping on the pavements gives industry a bad name. My friend was

Saying last week-he's the director of a multinational, mind you, not some small

Two-paisa business-he was saying that at least two hundred million people are

Surplus to requirements, they should be eliminated.....got rid of counting them as

Unemployment statistics year after year gets us nowhere just makes the numbers

Look bad. What kind of lives do they have anyway? They sit in the gutter and look

Like corpses. Death would be a mercy”(Mistry 372-373)

In presenting history Mistry concentrates on those moments or processes that are produced in the construction of cultural otherness. According to A.K.Singh “The prime aim of literature is to initiate dialogue where it does not exist, particularly between the people and the communities that share a certain geo-socio-political and cultural space” (Singh 109) “A Fine Balance” offers the social articulation of Otherness from a minority perspective, focusing on the world of the deprived classes with their aspirations and assertions.

Conclusion

On the whole, besides some minor quibbles of details, the novel gives a broader dimension to the present-day realities and earns cultural confidence. There is little doubt that Mistry has depicted awareness of his inheritance and complexities of modern life with expertise and vision.

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