

## Of Sickness and Health: Narrativising The Emergency in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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### Abstract

In the discourse of Indian nationalism, the years of the 'Indian Emergency' (1975-1977) have always been overwhelmingly infused with the complex nuances of displacement at various levels-spatial, social, political and cultural. Such nuances are often centred on the 'body' not only as a site of performance and violence but also as a potent site to inscribe the differences and otherness as witnessed in Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance*. The abundance of counter-spaces of alterity and the ruling metaphors of sickness and normalcy governing the systemic manipulation of 'body', especially the body of the dispossessed and homeless narrate the implicit violence of 'Indian Emergency' in the context of the hegemonic discourse of idealist nationalism. Rohinton Mistry, a Zoroastrian negotiating the socio-cultural and spatial dislocations of the alienation of the Zoroastrian Diaspora dwells on the 'minority perspective' on multiplicity of affiliations and locations and *A Fine Balance* offers an interesting perspective on the immediate and connecting reality of the concept of 'sickness' and 'health' and 'body' when contextualised during the traumatic years of Indira Gandhi's rule. This paper aims to examine the specific pattern of the representations of "Indian Emergency" in the context of disciplinary practices and the consequent transgressions integral to the representation of Indian history as valorised in *A Fine Balance*.

**Keywords:** Indian Emergency, nationalism, body, power, violence

"A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved"  
(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 136).

The "projects of docility" (*Discipline and Punish* 136) mentioned by Michel Foucault garners renewed interest when applied in the context of *A Fine Balance*, a novel set against the Emergency years of Indira Gandhi's rule (1975-1977). Michel Foucault rightly argues that power relations are invested and inscribed in the body and his famous statement "it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (*Discipline and Punish* 25) is particularly relevant to the context of the corporeal aesthetics of the Emergency. The national discourse on corporeality is hegemonic as control over bodies can be seen as an extension of the spatio-cultural control. In his representation of the corporeal domination, Mistry is clearly governed by Foucault's conceptualisation of the body as a cultural product, often replicating and mirroring the socio-political influences at work. In

the discourse of Indian nationalism, the years of “Indian Emergency” (1975-1977) have always been overwhelmingly infused with the complex nuances of displacement at various levels-spatial, social, political and cultural. Such nuances are often centred on the ‘body’ not only as a site of performance and violence but also as a potent site to inscribe the differences and otherness as witnessed in Rohinton Mistry’s novel *A Fine Balance*.

Rohinton Mistry, a Zoroastrian negotiating the socio-cultural and spatial dislocations of the alienation of the Zoroastrian Diaspora dwells on the ‘minority perspective’ on multiplicity of affiliations and locations and *A Fine Balance* offers an interesting perspective on the immediate and connecting reality of the concept of ‘sickness’ and ‘health’ when contextualised during the traumatic years of Indira Gandhi’s rule. This paper aims to examine the specific pattern of the representations of the Indian Emergency in the context of disciplinary practices and the consequent transgressions integral to the representation of Indian history as valorised in *A Fine Balance*. As the argument proceeds, the history of punishment during the Emergency is truly a history of bodies legitimised to the core. For example, the family planning programme, “the most controversial of Sanjay Gandhi’s pet projects” characterised by his classic “penchant for quick-fix solutions” deviating from “persuasive methods and the long-term goals advocated in the National Population Policy of 1976, drawn up by the department of family planning under Health Minister Dr Karan Singh” (Kapoor 235) is the most illustrative example of corporeal violence unleashed in Indian history. As Coomi Kapoor further illustrates:

Advocacy, publicity campaigns and awareness drives were measures Sanjay dismissed as ineffective. He wanted immediate results and tangible figures. He believed the only way to go about family planning was through mass sterilization programmes. His followers let loose a reign of terror to meet the statistical targets set by the impetuous young heir apparent and win his approval (235).

The abundance of counter-spaces of alterity and the ruling metaphors of sickness and normalcy governing the systemic manipulation of ‘body’, especially the body of the dispossessed and homeless narrate the implicit violence of the Indian Emergency in the context of the homogenic and hegemonic discourse of idealist nationalism. The representation of the twenty-two months Emergency of 1975-1977 is replete with the constant struggle between the spaces of alterity, the ‘counter-spaces’ instrumental to the projection of the Emergency ideal of normative perfection and the effort of “the ordinary practitioners of the city” who live ““down below,” the thresholds at which visibility begins” (Certeau 93) to transgress the utopian order. Their presence eludes visibility and their “bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms” (Certeau 93).

As evident, the systemic manipulation of the corporeal extends to the liminal spaces the characters inhabit-railway stations, shacks, slums, verandas of rented flats, chemist shop, footpaths. Ironically, the series of nomadic characters leading a nomadic life constantly challenges the corporeal aesthetic valorised during the Emergency. The tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash, Maneck Kohlah, Shankar the beggar, Rajaram the hair collector, Monkeyman etc. all bear the brunt of disciplinarity of the Emergency ideal mostly staged in the urban space thereby valorising the fact that “the city had an underground and repressed life, and hence an ‘unconscious’ of its own” (Lefebvre 36). The emergence of

the repressed vigour of the urban space is realized in the context of the 'counter-spaces' replicating socio-political oppositional strategies of subversion. The representation of the 'body' in urban space repeatedly corrodes the political effort to manipulate, distribute and organise the urban topography when the spatial chaos ensues in the form of the 'counter-sites' in which the existing social and spatial arrangements are "represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 24).

The mundane, urban world of *A Fine Balance* is replete with the presence of mutilated, disfigured and diseased bodies highly evocative of the plight of the nation. The novel opens with the reference to Ishvar Darji's "disfigured left cheek" (Mistry 3) and Omprakash's "frail spine" (Mistry 3) and predicts the course of the novel culminating in Maneck's suicide. Om's initial arrival in the city is marked by a "dent in back" (Mistry 3). The reign of terror is exemplified with bleak references to the appearance of grotesque, mutilated bodies on the railway track. The repeated appearance of corpses on the railway track, the benign symbol of the Emergency model of perfection and strategic manipulation draws attention to 'body'. As we proceed to understand, 'body', especially the male body in the context of *A Fine Balance* is the site of violence and beautification project undertaken during the Emergency. Ironically, mutilation and violence are common both in urban and rural spaces as witnessed in the plight of the Chamaar community. Narayan's mutilated body is handed over to his family and nothing except the charred bodies remain as reminders of Ishvar's family. The body remains central to the systematisation ensured by the "prohibition police" (Mistry 37) and, interestingly people like the slumlord Thokray decides the usage of common body during riots as he is the privileged one to decide "who gets burned and who survives" (Mistry 162).

The railway track and the railway station appear to be the most symbolic of all spaces in the novel; in true sense of the term, such spaces are disciplined but deviant, beautiful but grotesque to the core. During the Emergency, the trains do run on schedule but lapses happen with repeated appearance of unidentified corpses on the track on a regular basis; railway track being the most potent site to dump the unruly and deviant bodies; regular occurrence during the Emergency to maintain the disciplinary regularity. Ishvar, Omprakash and Maneck witness a similar incident on their arrival on the city not understanding the part it will play in their lives later. The following lines exemplify the confused reaction of the commoners and especially the commuters when mysterious and mutilated bodies appear on the railway tracks during the Emergency:

The men who had wandered outside came back with news that yet another body had been found by the tracks, near the level-crossing...

"Maybe it has to do with the Emergency," said someone.

"What emergency?"

"Prime Minister made a speech on the radio early this morning. Something about country being threatened from inside."

"Sounds like one more government tamasha."

"Why does everybody have to choose the railway tracks only for dying?" grumbled another. "No consideration for people like us. Murder, suicide, Naxalite-terrorist killing police-custody death-everything ends up delaying the trains. What is wrong with poison or tall buildings or knives" (Mistry 6-7)?

What is more important is the way the authority deals with the corpses; most of the time the “hastily covered corpse awaiting its journey to the morgue” (Mistry 7) hardly receives any funeral and the family is provided fake explanation. The reward of transgression is an unidentified death and Maneck’s friend Avinash too faces a similar plight. Avinash’s body was also found on the railway tracks, no identification and as specified by his father; ““they said he died because he fell off a fast train. They said he must have been hanging from the door or sitting on the roof”” (Mistry 489). Hence, the appearance of dead bodies on the railway track is common during the Emergency when the national authority’s demarcation of space reaches its height. Ironically, such experience becomes a part of the urban everyday as the tailors are frequently late due to the appearance of corpses on the track as Ishvar opines, “some poor fellow dead on the tracks again” (Mistry 78).

The hegemonic order replicated on the body leads to a sense of loathing, disgust and fear extending to the body politic as deformity and mutilation spans from the individual to the nation; micro to macro thereby exuding a sense of deviancy to the core. Mistry’s corporeal aesthetic is replete with references to and performance of the grotesque, monstrous and deviant bodies at multiple levels. To elaborate, Ishvar’s disfigured left cheek is symbolic of the failure of the authority to protect the Chamaar community, the marginalised group; and the most interesting of all characters is the community of grotesque beggars whose performance permeates the transgressive zones of the city. The beggars possess the inscribed and performed body in true sense of the term; theirs is the body at constant show. Keeping with the demand of the trade, Shankar, mutilated with missing fingers and thumbs and amputated legs is constantly performing with his ‘gaadi’. His mother Nosey, renowned for rare deformities, adds to the success of the ever-growing industry run by the Beggarmaster; an order transgressive in nature and constantly in defiance of the norms of beautification. But, the seed of deviancy is part of the administration as well and his community as well as income keep on growing. As evident, being a successful beggar means forced violence on the body and the more grotesque the body; the higher is the income generated. Corporeal violence is implicitly regulated in the community of beggars. The group of grotesque individuals simply overturns the exclusionary mechanism of the law of beautification prohibiting the emergence of deviant elements on the surface as transgression, abnormality and deviancy are the strategies of survival practised in marginal communities.

Such idea of the body as a culturally and socially marked site of appropriation replicates the concept of a Deleuzian body. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari represents a “body without organs” as a “chain of escape, and no longer a code” (362). Such bodies elude social, cultural, psychological and political systematisation and resembles the body which is “smooth, slippery, opaque, taut” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). As argued by Deleuze and Guattari, Mistry too represents a transgressive corporeality where the body unravels the stricture of the hegemonic order only to escape the order inscribed.

As mentioned, such transgressive corporeality is crucial to the role of the Beggarmaster as a successful entrepreneur. His enterprise survives on the strategic manipulation of physical deformity and the careful admiration of the element of transgression. His most prized possession is the “large sketchbook containing his notes and diagrams relating to the dramaturgy of begging” (Mistry 437). This document is the storehouse of deformities of unique types to garner more interest and more cash:

They crowded around to look at the sketch: two figures, one sitting aloft on the shoulders of the other. "For this, I need a lame beggar and a blind beggar. The blind man will carry the cripple on his shoulders. A living, breathing image of the ancient story about friendship and cooperation. And it will produce a fortune in coins, I am absolutely certain, because people will give not only from pity or piety but also from admiration." The hitch was in finding a blind beggar who was strong enough or a lame beggar who was light enough (Mistry 437).

His obsession with physical deformities predicts the appearance of more Deleuzian bodies on the surface of the ordered and beautified urban topography, bodies which will defy the logic and rationale of the functionalist administration, bodies which will transgress the boundary of normalcy to verge on monstrosity:

The picture consisted of three figures. The first was seated on a platform with tiny wheels. He had no legs or fingers, and the thigh stumps jutted like hollow bamboo. The second was an emaciated woman without a nose, the face with a gaping hole at its centre. But the third figure was the most grotesque. A man with a briefcase chained to his wrist was standing on four spidery legs. His four feet were splayed towards the four points of the compass, as though in a permanent dispute about which was the right direction. His two hands each had ten fingers, useless bananas sprouting from the palms. And on his face were two noses, adjacent yet bizarrely turned away, as though neither could bear the smell of the other (Mistry 451).

Hence, Mistry's conceptualization of the body politic is inclusive of the matrix of diseased body, monstrosity and physical deformities and acts of violence are crucial to the paradigm of 'sickness' and 'health' valorised during the Emergency. To elaborate, unproductive and unhealthy bodies are frequently dumped beyond the limits of the city; Sergeant Kesar is accused of supplying unproductive cripples to the work-camp and his bitter reply is poignant and replete with the prevalent sense of dehumanisation, "I cannot pick and choose healthy specimens for you--- this isn't a cattle market. My orders are to clear the streets" (Mistry 317).

As expressed, the representation of abnormality and deviancy haunts the ordered urban fabric and the diseased body politic penetrates the sacrosanct borders of the city, thereby problematising the matrix of strategic spatial configuration. The primary significance of the body in Foucauldian account of governmentality posits it as a major signifier as the visibility and consequent vulnerability of the body is a site of governmentality. Mistry cautiously foregrounds the radical corporeal transformations forced on the urban space during the Emergency as the meticulous extension of the vulnerabilities and intrigues of the political world. The city marked as diseased is in utter need of beautification and discipline; the urban fabric bears the scar of the failure of the cohesive rhetoric of national progress and unity. The nuances of the metaphorical as well as the metonymic associations between the urban corporeality and the spatio-political transformations of the nation can hardly be missed. The gross, corporeal terms and metaphors of mutilation and disfigurements unique to the body politic encroach upon the urban fabric and consequently, we witness the diseased plight of the city, victim of the onslaught of major spatial transformations:

Plotches of pale moonlight revealed an endless stretch of patchwork, the sordid quiltings of plastic and cardboard and paper and sackcloth, like scabs and blisters

creeping in a dermatological nightmare across the rotting body of the metropolis. When the moon was blotted by clouds, the slum disappeared from sight. The stench continued to vouch for its presence (Mistry 373).

As evident, relations of power are inscribed not only on the human body; but also, on the decaying body of the metropolis as visualised in the vivid description of the corporeality of the city, thereby contributing to the overwhelming questions related to individual agency when confronted with the turmoil of transformative transgressions.

The paradigm of 'sickness' and 'health' coupled with the references to disfigured and diseased bodies abound in the text. Moreover, increasing animosity and violence leading to frequent accidents too contribute to the increasing number of corporeal deformities and accidents and consequent injuries happen to be the distinguishing feature of the irrigation project:

There were other accidents too, more severe than Ishvar's. a blind woman, set to crushing rocks, had after several successful days, smashed her fingers with the hammer. A child fell from a scaffolding and broke both legs. An armless man, carrying sand in panniers on a shoulder yoke, suffered neck injuries when he lost his balance and the yoke slipped (Mistry 353).

Hence, undernourished and skeletal bodies with scars and signs of disfigurement are repeated realities in Mistry's narrative of the nation. The sign of mutilated bodies accumulating in the truck is a disgusting sight for Ishvar at the work-camp; the bodies of the pavement-dwellers appear like "rag-wrapped bodies" (Mistry 153) on the pavements resembling corpses; Rajaram, the hair collector murders the two beggars with beautiful locks and bodies in urban landscape resemble nothing but corpses to heighten the comparison between the 'body' and the reality of the body politic aptly embodied in the city.

Such ritualized and repetitive acts of violence and cruelty characterise the urban space and highlight the repetitive measures and performative subversions integral to the conceptualisation of the uniformity of progress unique to the narrative of the nation. As argued by Judith Butler "repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 178). The chapters entitled "Day at the Circus, Night in the Slums", "Beautification" in *A Fine Balance* foreground such classic regulatory and hegemonic course of nation in terms of repetitive performance of the "onstage buffoonery" (Mistry 260) with "clowns, monkeys, acrobats, everything" (Mistry 261). The features of the Twenty-Point-Programme are highlighted and everyone is amazed by the appearance of the hot-air balloon which led to the whirlwind affecting the eighty-foot cutout of the Prime Minister. The most telling example is the following dialogue of the minister who easily embodies the Nation in the Prime Minister:

Yes, my brothers and sisters, *Mother India* sits on stage with us, and the *Son of India* shines from the sky upon us! The glorious present, here, now, and the golden future, up there, waiting to descend and embrace our lives! What a blessed nation we are (Mistry 264)! (Italics Mine)

Mistry foregrounds various subtle means of regulatory and classificatory discipline; the most important being the emphasis on the regularity of performing the disciplinary acts; the multiple forms of atrocities perpetuated by the state remain hidden through mutual

ideological participation and the metonymic representation of the nation as an extension of the corporeal remains intact in public memory.

The Emergency ideal operating on the ideals of “constraints, prohibitions or obligations” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 136) follows the principle that “rational organization must thus repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it” (Certeau 94) and henceforth, the process of regulatory and classificatory operations of the Emergency rule is staged on disciplining the body, especially the deviant, diseased and male body. As opined by Michel Foucault, the ‘docile’, marginalised bodies do contribute to the project of corporeal domination, “a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’ ” (*Discipline and Punish* 137) during the Emergency projects of ruling out deviancy from the core. The ‘political anatomy’ that Foucault argues is based on not mere coercions but on a calculated and hidden manipulation of the normative discourse centred on the body:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 138)

As elaborated, the mechanics of power invests the ‘body’ with modes of existence alternating between ‘healthy’ and ‘diseased’; normal and deviant and the nuances of the political investment in the ‘body’ can hardly be missed. The desire to produce a disciplined and regulated body reaches its coercive height during the Emergency “since few people came forward voluntarily for sterilization—particularly as many also believed it was physically disabling and medically dangerous” (Kapoor 236) and we witness the most gruesome example of brutality when the tailors approach The Rations Officer, desperate to fill his quota for promotion for a ration card. The conversation between the men is infused with political ambiguity and hollow promises:

“If you let me arrange for your vasectomy, your application can be approved instantly.”

“Vasectomy?”

“You know, for Family Planning. The nussbandhi procedure.”

“Oh, but I already did that,” lied Ishvar.

“ Show me your F.P.C.”

“F.P.C.?”

“Family Planning Certificate.”

“Look, if the harmless little operation frightens you, send this young fellow. All I need is one sterilization certificate” (Mistry 177).

Ironically, the sterilization camps and the Family Planning Centres are carefully infused with carnivalesque aura and paraphernalia of celebratory diligence only to hide the detailed investment in the aesthetics of corporeal control what Foucault terms the “new micro-physics of power” (*Discipline and Punish* 139). The mode of detailed political investment in the body is crucial to the nation-wide acceptance of the Nussbandhi Mela,

carefully planned as a celebratory mechanism to participate in the grand dream of nation-building; hence the exhortation and hoax emanating carnivalesque aura:

Market day was noisier than usual because the Family Planning Centre was promoting its sterilization camp from a booth in the square, its loudspeakers at full blast. Banners were strung across the road, exhorting participation in the Nussbandhi Mela. The usual paraphernalia of the fairground – balloons, flowers, sopa bubbles, coloured lights, snacks—were employed to lure the townsfolk and visiting villagers. *The film songs were interrupted often with announcements about the nation's need for birth control, the prosperity and happiness in store for those willing to be sterilized, the generous bonuses for vasectomies and tubectomies* (Mistry 513-14). (Italics mine)

The sterilization camps operate on the process of disciplinary regularity and a systematisation of various forms of enclosure and its specifications in terms of entry and exit points and most importantly the number of 'bodies' being sterilised or made defunct in the name of population control and the consequent prosperity of the nation. As Coomy Kapoor argues:

State after state issued a series of draconian measures to ensure that their statistical targets would meet Sanjay's approval. The result was that between 1975 and 1976 sterilization achieved 107 per cent of the allotted target, and during 1976 to 1977 they reached an astonishing 190 per cent of the projected target. There were 26.24 lakh sterilizations in 1975-76 and a phenomenal 81.32 lakh sterilizations 1976-77. Some eager-beaver chief ministers were particularly keen to be counted as overachievers (236).

Ironically, no sense of hygiene is maintained in such camps and the doctors are required to track only the numbers. The mechanics of transformation meted out to the bodies make the sterilization camps appear like factory with the aesthetics of dehumanisation and consequent commodification as apparent in the following conversation between the tailors and Ashraf Chacha:

Ashraf said the Centre usually erected tents outside town. "They set it up like a factory. Cut here, snip there a few stitches—and the goods are ready to be shipped."

"Sounds just like the tailoring business, yaar."

"Actually, we tailors take more pride in our work. We show more consideration for fabric than these monsters show for humans. It is our nation's shame" (Mistry 514).

As apparent in the novel, it is especially the male body which is the main target and site of the immanent and emerging forms of violence during the Emergency. Enclosed, disciplined and mechanical; hence the sterilization camps are truly the centre of inscription of power on deviant bodies as Foucault rightly argues "discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony" (*Discipline and Punish* 141).

Ironically, the interplay between grotesque, ugly, diseased and deviant bodies clashes with the nationwide project of beautification undertaken by the authority. The process of

beautification necessarily involved a cautious performance, preferably a show to make people distinguish between beauty and ugliness, normalcy and deviancy, discipline and punishment. The violence implicit in such performance is visible in the gruesome nature of Shankar's accident, crossing all limits of ugliness as his flesh and the 'gaadi' got intermingled and cannot be separated: "Both Shankar and the gaadi were crushed completely—not possible to separate the two. Removing the wood and castors embedded in his flesh would have meant mutilating his poor body still more. It will have to be cremated with him" (Mistry 491). The nation is on the path of progress through the projects of slum prevention and city beautification and ironically, people like Rajaram becomes the Motivator for Family Planning. But, in spite of all efforts, the transgressive and deviant bodies do emerge on the surface from time to time, "around this time, beggars reoccupied their places on the pavements, as the Beautification Law ran its schizophrenic course and grew moribund" (Mistry 473). Such agony of homelessness is apparent in Om's banal acceptance of the corporeal cruelty when he opines; "Maybe I should have the operation," said Om. "Get a Bush transistor. And then the ration card would also be possible" (Mistry 193).

As evident, Mistry takes recourse to a "sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 177) to represent a crisis in power relations which mirrors a larger socio-political ideal. Mistry consciously deploys the performative aspect of corporeal monstrosity and ugliness in terms of "*stylized repetition of acts*" (*Gender Trouble* 179) intrinsic to the process of beautification and only to embark at the gradual erosion of the prevalent utopian ideology. As witnessed in the novel, the Prime Minister's face appears to be gigantic, surreal and often verging on being monstrous. Moreover, the monstrosity is highlighted in terms of disciplinary regularity and the "quintessential specimen of the face that was proliferating on posters throughout the city" (Mistry 180) is a testimony to her status as the ultimate guardian; the testimony to the performative functionality of her 'face' is obvious in the following reference:

Her cheeks were executed in the lurid pink of cinema billboards. Other aspects of the portrait had suffered greater infelicities. Her eyes evoked the discomfort of a violent itch somewhere upon the ministerial corpus, begging to be scratched. The artist's ambition of a benignant smile had also gone awry – a cross between a sneer and the vinegary sternness of a drill mistress had crept across the mouth. And that familiar swatch of white hair over her forehead, imposing amid the black, had plopped across the scalp like the strategic droppings of a very large bird (Mistry 180).

The above description of her face is infused with lurid connotations of a monstrous body, a body let loose to wreak havoc occupying ambiguous, in-between spaces. The conscious failure of the artist situates her monstrous body as an ambivalent category where the visible use of 'excessive presence' fail to capture the 'excessive absence'. As argued by Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, spaces occupied by the monstrous, ugly and deviant bodies are needed to "circumscribe the domain of the subject" (3). Therefore, for the onlookers, the experience of the large, monstrous body of the Prime Minister is overwhelming as it conjoins the livable and unlivable zones into a single spatio-temporal reality and never fails to threaten the audience with the potential of unleashing the reign of monstrosity. Unlike the representation of the Prime Minister, the description of the grotesque, nomadic characters is a testimony to their performative functionality as non-

subjects; “the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3).

Mistry deploys the category of ugliness not only as a strategic subversion of dominant cultural codes but also as a constitutive marker of subjectivity as the process “requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). The reference to the shared characteristics central to the community of the marginal characters in reality valorise the exclusionary spaces they inhabit; ““unliveable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). The apparently dormant matrix of hideous, dubious, horrifying, ambiguous, grotesque, repulsive, monstrous beings continually emerges to challenge the normative laws the society thrives on. The resurgence of deviant, grotesque and ambiguous bodies in the urban space disrupts the cautious performances of the Emergency Ideal where the normative representation of body draws attention to the paradigm of beauty and ugliness. As witnessed in the text, grotesque and deviant bodies are situated on the socio-cultural margins; they occupy the subterranean, liminal, ad-hoc spaces and often escape institutional codification and logic. The eruption of the element of grotesque is often threatening for the dwellers of the city which is undergoing beautification. The procession for the cremation of Shankar is the unique example of the emergence of the forbidden forces in the form of diseased bodies within the planned space of the city; “the assembly of crippled, blinded, armless, legless, diseased, and faceless individuals on the pavement soon attracted an audience. Onlookers inquired whether some hospital, for lack of space, was conducting an outdoor clinic” (Mistry 493).

As seen in the text, ugliness appears as a culturally contingent category to denote subversive binaries as “ugliness has often served as the all-purpose repository for everything that [does] not quite fit, it has served as a marker of mundane reality, the irrational, evil, disorder, dissonance, irregularity, excess, deformity, the marginal: in short, the *Other*” (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 281). The representation of the marginal characters with their ghoulish habits and physical gestures borders on ugliness and their bodies do appear as markers of monstrosity and ugliness. To elaborate, filthy ambience, unhygienic food, enclosed spaces like the slum, chemist’s shop entrance, pavement etc. serve as the archival repository of the nomadic mass whose habits are often filthy and cross all barriers of civility. For example, the habit of defecating on the railway track is turned into an art by Rajaram who proudly declares himself as their “Goo Guru” (Mistry 169); Dina is aghast when the tailors use her bathroom as the stink is unbearable. Here, ugly and monstrous body is represented as a category of hatred, disgust and aberration.

The nomadic characters are prototypes that do not easily comply with prescribed norms of appearance and behaviour and create an “exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). As we witness, in the novel, ugliness and monstrosity create zones of “collective disidentifications” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 4) in contrast to the regulatory norms the subjects of beauty are reliant on. Shankar’s funeral procession is the best example to challenge the paradigm of ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’; ‘sickness’ and health’:

The slowest – moving procession ever to wind its way through city streets started towards the cremation grounds just after four. The great number of cripples kept it at a snail’s pace. The deformities of some had atrophied their bodies, reducing them to a froglike squat; they swung along using their arms as levers. A few could only manage the sideways shuffle of a crab. Others, doubled

over, crawled forward on their hands and feet, their behind raised in the air like camels' humps. By a tacit consensus, the cortege proceeded at the lowest common velocity, but their spirits were high as they laughed and chatted among themselves, enjoying a new experience, so that it seemed more a festival than a funeral (Mistry 494-5).

The funeral procession is the ultimate enactment of the failure of the rhetoric of national unity and progress as the grotesque bodies do perform their best to establish, although in a farcical way the utter failure of the beautification law during the Emergency. The assembly of the beggars defies the codes of spatio-cultural strategies undertaken and thereby serves as a reminder of the fact that their anonymous, 'non-subject' status is purely provisional; the return of the repressed is a perpetual reality the manipulated urban fabric sincerely hides.

Ironically, when the procession reaches halfway to the cremation grounds, the police arrives as they receive a report "on the wireless that a mock funeral was underway, intended to make some kind of political statement, which would most definitely have contravened Emergency regulations" (Mistry 496). The sarcasm inherent in the procession is threatening to the normative discourse of progress and unity as the assembly of so many deviant bodies of the beggars will definitely arouse suspicions as "they were mistaken for political activists in fancy dress—troublemakers indulging in street theatre, portraying government figures as crooks and criminals embarked on begging the nation" (Mistry 496).

Death and deviancy triumph in the novel as replicated in Maneck's eventual suicide which exemplifies the utter failure of the national ideal during the Emergency. Moreover, Ishvar and Om return to the city as cripples; their body bearing the signs of the nationwide scar. The forced vasectomy infuses Ishvar's body with poison and his legs are amputated to save his life. Hence, Isvar returns symbolically as well as physically as the new 'Shankar', the beggar whereas Om is now a eunuch due to Thakur Dharamsi's vengeance. The ironic comparison highlights only the cruelty inherent in the body politic and establishes the fact that binaries in any form, are, therefore, genuinely embodied realities; as binding as any other prevalent discourses. Judith Butler rightly argues; "discourses do actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies, bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their own lifeblood" (Meijer and Prins 282) and it is the 'body', metaphorically and metonymically which carries the idealistic failure of the Emergency to the core.

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