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A Fine Balance



Synopsis

With a compassionate realism and narrative sweep that recall the work of Charles Dickens, this magnificent novel captures all the cruelty and corruption, dignity and heroism, of India. The time is 1975. The place is an unnamed city by the sea. The government has just declared a State of Emergency, in whose upheavals four strangers--a spirited widow, a young student uprooted from his idyllic hill station, and two tailors who have fled the caste violence of their native village--will be thrust together, forced to share one cramped apartment and an uncertain future. As the characters move from distrust to friendship and from friendship to love, A Fine Balance creates an enduring panorama of the human spirit in an inhuman state. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I walked by the homeless in the streets while growing up in a city by the sea not unlike the one in this book. I was repulsed by their grimy faces, their missing limbs, their tattered and dirty clothes. Fearful I might catch their poor people diseases if I ventured too close, I would cross the street to avoid them. Sometimes throwing coins into their tin cups from a sterile distance-sometimes missing, and walking away praising my own charity. Thank you Mr. Mistry for showing me the other side of the story. Thank you for putting into plain and powerful words exactly how unfair life in India is to the poor and lower castes. You have taught me more than any text book could about the injustices that daily occur in India. I hate you for your brutal honesty and for making me feel this way. Or perhaps, like you prophesized in the begining of this book, I am only blaming you for my own insensitivity. For those of you considering reading this book, here is my warning. Mistry will seduce you with his

flowing words and his gripping story. He will make you feel for his characters. He will show you a side of life that millions of people bravely struggle through. And soon you will begin to fear turning the page for fear of what might happen to the characters. And rest assured, when you turn the last page, and look for some solace, you will find none. For all is true. I have seen the Shankars and Ishvars and Oms. Go to any Indian city street corner, and you will too.

It was with some trepidation that I read this book, as I have frequently found Indian novels to be very heavy going and full of doom and gloom, but it was recommended by someone with very good taste, and I thought I'd take the plunge. I am very glad I did - it is the finest novel of the Indian sub-continent that I have encountered. The lives of the main characters are certainly not easy, so I guess I must confess that there is a fair share of the aforementioned doom and gloom. But our heroes are so well drawn, so fully rounded and so full of adventure and thirst for whatever life throws at them (and it throws plenty), that you get completely sucked into the complexities of their existences. Rohinton Mistry is a fine, talented writer. The prose flows easily, and India in all of its richness and dire poverty is there before you. It is quite an experience, not always a comfortable one, sometimes very entertaining, and all in all one I thoroughly recommend.

India, a country I knew little about, haunts me since reading this book. The author captures on paper the feeling of India on every page. The sounds, the smells and the people stay with me well after the last page was turned. Unforgettable characters that evoke every type of emotion! Rohinton Mistry meshes the lives of four people of diverse backgrounds into a bond that lasts a lifetime. The in-depth look at a culture and a people that I knew little about has brought about an understanding that I previously lacked. Dina Dalal, widowed and determined to make it as an independent woman in a world where women have little value, becomes the unwilling glue that supports 3 other lives. Maneck Kohlah is a student, sent by his parents from his mountain village to attend school in the city. Ishvar Darji and his nephew Omprakash are tailors escaping the terror in their village by moving to the city to look for work. This unlikely group of people become dependent on each other out of necessity, their lives entangling to create the basis of the story. This book is written with much sadness as well as humour and has touched a place in my heart. I look forward to reading more by this author in the future. Bravo!

This is a book about relationships and trust. One could cloyingly say it is about the human spirit but it is simply about 4 people, living in times that make trust nearly impossible. The characters are

utterly absorbing and the descriptions of life in a caste system are compelling. It is not a happy novel, it is instead deeply disturbing. But Mistry stunningly transports his reader to this place, inside the lives of these people where you smell the smells, feel their pain, and search for a way to find meaning in their lives. This book is painful, but it deserves to be read.

You know you've read an epic novel when its 5th line had you sucked hook line and sinker. This 2-time "just missed Pulitzer" masterpiece from RM was stuck in my hands until I had it smacked down to the very last word. Immaculate piece of literature, this, you'll be an instant RM convert. Although it's named "A Fine Balance", this novella is one of those rare gems that simply blow you out of the bubble in which you lead your life -- impervious to the extremities around you. I found myself almost living in the world of our 4 protagonists as they go from bouquets to brickbats. Mistry's fluent and witty language only eggs you on, I found myself amused and chuckling at many points in the book, and hard as it is to admit, I even had my eyes welled up on more occasions than I can remember. Our protagonists are simple people, mind you. A couple of tailors, a young woman who makes her life sewing, her brother who makes it in "business". The idiosyncrasies of each character, their daily peccadilloes, the minute lens with which we are exposed to their smallest emotions, joys and fears -- as a peak into the ordinary Indian life, I simply cannot imagine a more accurate or grittier novel in recent memory. India is indeed a country where the sinister contours of social strata (the caste system, to be specific) often seem clumsy, ominous or just plain grotesque, where deep ideological divisions feed into and exacerbate ordinary social mores. Even external dangers play themselves out domestically. A Fine Balance brims with such clear-eyed, tragicomic, Dickens-like observations of the Indian fabric. Ingenious, wholesome, and deeply moving. Not just for Indians or people interested in India, this novel is a delight to read for ANYONE even mildly interested in literature. Highly, highly recommended!

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