A Fine Balance (1996)

Rohinton Mistry
Bombay Our City

Anand Patwardhan (1985)
The Emergency, 1975-1977

Good site for info:

http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~ghosh20p/index.html
The Emergency: Some Key Issues for the Novel

- Suppression of unions and labour movements
- MISA: Maintenance of Internal Security Act
  - Suspension of habeas corpus, civil rights, etc.
- Censorship of the press
- High level of (agricultural and industrial) growth
- Hindu-Muslim tensions held in abeyance
The ‘TPP’ (Twenty Point Programme)

- Attack on Rural Poverty
- Strategy for Rainfed Agriculture
- Better Use of Irrigation Water
- Bigger Harvest
- Enforcement of Land Reforms
- Special Programmes for Rural Labour
- Clean Drinking Water
- Health for All
- Two Child Norm
- Expansion of Education

- Justice to Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
- Equality for Women
- New Opportunities for Youth
- Housing for the People
- Improvement of Slums
- New Strategy for forestry
- Protection of the Environment
- Concern for the Consumer
- Energy for the Villages
- A Responsive Administration
Some Themes to Discuss

- Rural to urban migration: The promise of improvement or the ‘nightmare of arrival’ (153)?
- ‘Poverty porn’ or masterful narrative—or both?
- God as the quilt-maker: potent or overwrought metaphor?
  - Epic tradition: *The Odyssey*
  - Zoroastrianism as monotheistic religion
  - The AIDS memorial quilt (started 1987)
Some Themes to Discuss

- The shadow of Partition
- Sectarian violence: Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, the invasion of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, the Assassination of the PM
- National allegory?
  - Indian history as told through personal stories
- Emigration
  - Lack of opportunity, rights in India
  - Dubai: Male experience vs. female experience
  - 1975: Date of Mistry’s own departure from India
  - Mistry’s authorship from abroad: India as seen from Canada at a significant historical remove
The role of accidents and coincidence: re-inscription of the 19th-century novel?
- Narrative strands, threads

Processes of narration
- Overlapping stories of different social classes/caste/ethnic backgrounds/geographic regions of India
- Heavy use of dialogue as mode of narration
- Is free indirect discourse more associated with Dina and Maneck than the tailors?
Slumdog Millionaire
(and Swarup’s original novel Q & A):
Cribbing from A Fine Balance

- Slumlord, mutilation of people to turn them into beggars
- Life in the jhopadpatti (Dharavi)
- Hindu-Muslim tensions (Clip 1)
- The rebuilding of the city to force out the poor and dispossessed (Clip 2)
- Corrupt police; torture
Marketing: Oprah’s Book Club

Have a look at the questions on the handout...
Some passages for us to mull over...
(concentrating on the first half of the novel)

• 81-2: Omprakash and Ishvar debate the nature of exploitation
• 107: the Mahatma’s message regarding untouchability
• 128-31: the attack on Ashraf and the violence of Independence
• 180-1: the posters of the PM
• 205: ‘trapped by history’
• 223: ‘Distance was a dangerous thing...’ AND 614: ‘Distance is a difficult thing.’
• 228-9: Yeats and Valmik
• 266-7: the cutout of the PM at the rally
• 272-3: The cats (and Baumgartner’s Bombay)
• 310: ‘If time were a bolt of cloth...’
• *328-9: Shankar’s paean to the Beggarmaster
• 340: God the quilt-maker
• 371-3: Dina and Maneck visit Nusswan
• 383: the city as ‘story factory’