

**The Portrayal of the Subalterns in Some Selected Indian English Novels:**

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*,  
Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*,  
Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*,  
Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.



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(ii)

Fondly Dedicated  
To  
My Late Mother.  
I always miss you Maa.



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## Abstract

In this dissertation, I have focused on four novels of Indian authors: *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai. I have focused on five subaltern characters and their disaster in India's caste based society. Caste discrimination, untouchability and subalternity are a despicable practice in India. Over the years books have been written, committees and commissions have been set up, and laws have been enacted to eradicate the caste taboo and the stigma of untouchability but, even after six decades of Independence, India continues the inhuman caste discrimination. The upper caste practice some inhuman codes for the lower caste. They are marginalized by the old age oppressive system of the society. In the pre-1960s, most of the writers dealt with upper and middle class people but did not explore the struggle of lower and subaltern class. A majority of the Indian novelists including Mulk Raj Anand, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, have appeared at the contemporary time and shown an open concern for the subaltern class. These four novels represent the struggle of the subalterns for their lower position in society. The subalterns are at the bottom of the social pyramid and are utterly unprivileged. For thousand of years they lived and died as menials, in conditions worse than that of slaves. The novels which are discussed in this thesis involve a deep exploration of the subaltern class. The authors have worked on the theme to make the upper castes aware and destroy the caste and class taboos. These novels also exhibit the subalterns' turmoil in their inner psychology and their struggle to elevate their social and economic positions. This thesis aims to explore the subalterns' struggle in India through the depiction of the subaltern characters of these novels. Thus, it must give an overview of the subaltern subjectivity and their struggle in India to project the issue on the world stage.



## Introduction

More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like. – Narayan, an untouchable character in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, p.172.

Caste discrimination, untouchability and subalternity became the major crises for India from the prehistoric age. During the colonial time the British rulers oppressed the colonized people without considering their caste or class. So the subaltern class was oppressed both by the colonizers and the upper castes. Although the British were aware of the inhumanity inherent in the caste system, they did not outlaw the practice. They realized that the caste system is an ugly practice in Indian society but they made no difference to the cultural life of the Indians, except in a superficial way. Thus, the caste discrimination was strictly followed all through the colonial era.

Class discrimination was officially abolished in 1950 by the Indian constitution which recognizes the Right of Equality as a fundamental right. Not that the constitution and Independence have made a great difference to the subalterns' social life in the post colonial period since it is an age old prejudice. Independence has marked only the political liberation from the colonial yoke, and not the attainment of social freedom. Political dictators were gone but social dictatorship still persisted and the subalterns are the worst victims of this social dictatorship. Subalternity is the cruel and unhealthy social practice that is attached to a large section of the Indian populace for which they are harassed and oppressed in various ways.

Decades of anti-disability legislation, poverty alleviation programs and other official measures aim at empowering the subalterns and erasing the stigma of untouchability but they have not exactly succeeded in removing the problem. Although most Dalit organizations have noble aims at heart, their focus has been primarily on reservation quotas and related privileges rather than integration of the subalterns with the

of the Indian society or their economic advancement. A large number of the subalterns are wage workers, farm workers, bonded labours, cobblers, leather workers, street sweepers and manual scavengers who live mostly in the villages, have very limited or no access to education and do not hope to benefit from reservations all that much. Subalterns are the lowest class of people who suffer the worst social ostracism and economic exploitation. They continue to live on the margins of Indian society, in sub-human conditions – exploited, ostracized, and socially excluded.

In the post-colonial era, not many Indian authors have dealt with the subaltern class but Mulk Raj Anand in his novels, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937); Rahinton Mistry in *A Fine Balance* (1995), Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) have presented authentically the subaltern class struggle without sentimentalizing or projecting false heroism for ideological reasons. The aim of these fictional works is to sensitise the Indian society to the suffering of the Dalit subalterns and to project the issue on the world stage. These novels seem to do precisely what the government has failed to do – initiate an international discussion of the caste question. This thesis aims to present an overview of the subaltern subjectivity by discussing the above mentioned novels and show how the subaltern protagonists resist the subordination in their own way, and critically assess the achievement of these novels in social terms.

## Who are the Subalterns?

This thesis deals with the portrayal of the subaltern class in Indian literature. The keyword, ‘Subaltern’ is a concept first fully defined by the Italian Marxist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937). According to Gramsci, the subaltern can be any person or group of inferior rank and station because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. In *The Modern Prince* and *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci describes the subaltern classes as those subordinated by cultural constructions, what we call “hegemony”, and excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power.

The concept of hegemony was also first used by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony, as expressed by Gramsci, is rooted in the notion of “intellectual and moral leadership” (Kurtz, 1996:103). Hegemony therefore, refers to the different organizations involved in state formation (Kurtz, 1996:107), but it is always a process “aimed at obtaining consent and establishing its legitimacy” (Gramsci, 1971:12 in Kurtz, 1996). Thus, ‘The Subaltern is a group that is not part of a dominant power structure.’

Subaltern is a term that commonly refers to the people from regions and groups outside of the hegemonic power structure. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is disputed. Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes. Others, such as **Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak** uses it in a more specific sense. She argues that subaltern is not

just a classy word for oppressed, for Others, somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie .....In post colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern- a space of difference. Now who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern.... Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated- against minority on the university campus, they do not need the word ‘subaltern’... They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.

**Homi Bhabha**, a key thinker among post colonial critics, emphasizes the importance of social power relations to ‘subaltern’ groups. He says, “oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.”

The term “subaltern”, thus, refers to “those groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of the ruling classes,” as it is pointed out in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial*



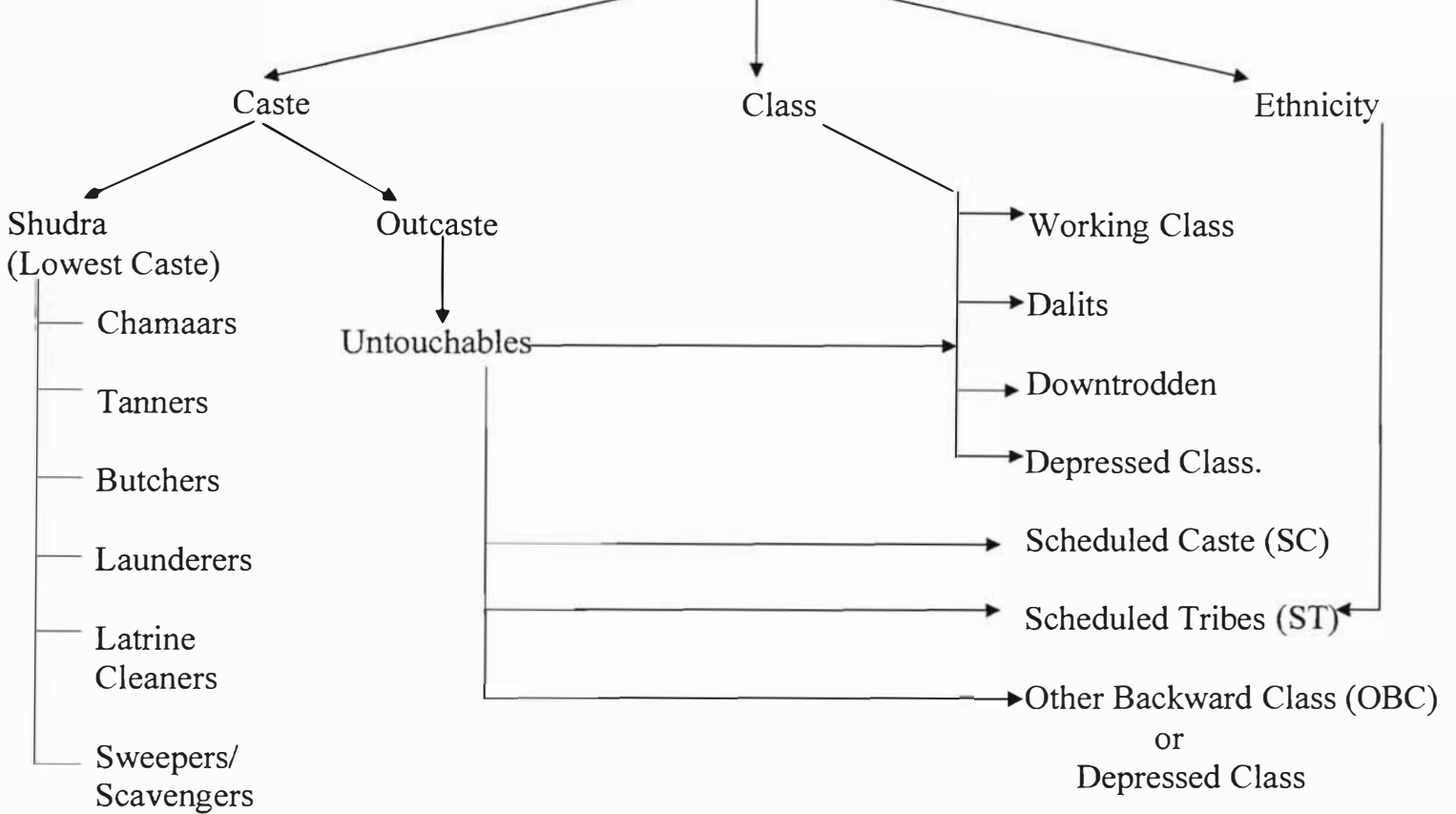


Chart-1



udies (215). Jawaharlal Nehru once commented: "... No group, no community, no country, has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor" (qtd. in Jayawarena, 73). Here, Nehru suggests that the oppressed is usually under the manipulation of the oppressor. The idea of 'subaltern' is still difficult to grasp and even more difficult to write about. The term has also been used to describe other groups who are excluded and do not have a position from which to speak. Gramsci further notes that the subaltern class by definition is not unified and can not unite until the subalterns are able to become a 'state'".

### **the Subaltern study group:**

In the post-Independent India of the 1980s, the Indian literary world examines the subalterns and their historiography with a critical view. In the last three decades, the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) has produced a large quantity of literature on the peasant and working classes and its impact has been felt beyond India. In 1982, a group of South Asian scholars have started their activities under the title, "The Subaltern Study Group" (SSG) or "Subaltern Studies collectives" led by Ranajit Guha, an Indian historian.

The founding members of the group challenge Indian Marxist historians and they aim to write the people's history authentically. In doing so, they respond to a genuine need for a new methodology, epistemology, and paradigm. The Subaltern Studies Group seeks to provide new interpretations and methodologies for writing about Indian working-class struggle. Dinesh Chakrabarty, a leading Subaltern Studies spokesman, says that the goal of subaltern studies is neither to achieve political democracy nor to promote the equal distribution of wealth but to keep alive the philosophical truth, which means some 'real' truth exists which can be uncovered. This assumption is a "powerful medicine" as Friedman puts it. Friedman explains, "The hegemonic structure of the world is no longer reality, and its culture form is also dissolving." Therefore, the subaltern scholars are not writing to describe how some groups in Asia, Africa or Latin America resist the penetration of colonialism; instead, as Chakrabarty claims, they are trying "to take history to its limits" in order to "make its unworking visible"

Since 1983 the subaltern studies Group has produced eight volumes (volume 9 will be available soon) and several monographs. Ranajit Guha has edited the first six volumes (1982), which cover various themes including critiques of elite historiography, uncovering peasants' belief systems, peasant movements, revolts, Indian nationalism, peasant insurgency, subaltern consciousness and politics, even a few critiques of subaltern studies and so on. Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, Sumit Sarkar and some other Indian scholars are working broadly to remove the elitist bias from history and to empower the subalterns. The original purpose of Subaltern Studies is to "produce historical analysis in which the subaltern groups are viewed as the subjects of their own history" (Chakrabarty 472). Since the subaltern is not acknowledged as the maker of his own destiny and is denied the access to hegemonic power, the central issue of subaltern mobilizations is "a notion of resistance to elite domination" (Chakrabarty 472).

### **Does Subaltern Studies bring social justice for all?**

Jene Lerche, a scholar in South Asian Studies, points out a strong contradiction in subaltern studies writings. She remarks that they concentrate mostly on the conflicts between tribal and non-tribal people and not on landless groups (which are work related): "It is mainly (but not only) when struggles can be understood within contexts rather than the work relation, such as conflicts between tribal and non-tribal people, or questions of ethnicity and religion that they have become foci for subaltern enquiries." Similarly, Ortner states "the lack of an adequate sense of prior and ongoing politics among subalterns must inevitably contribute to an inadequate analysis of resistance itself." Another problem with the subaltern studies school is that it does not apply the heading of culture to material relationship in its analysis of subalterns. In fact, the arguments of subaltern studies mystify the relationship between power and culture, and in the process help the ideology of global capitalism to achieve its goal. Furthermore, Subaltern Studies promotes the idea of differences based on ethnicity, religion, region, race and gender identities. Before accepting these differences, we must understand how these identities

created and promoted in the real world. The general concern about subalterns implies a commitment to the notion of social justice for oppressed and subordinated people. Most members of the Subaltern Study Group in India, and now of a Subaltern Group in Latin America as well, come from progressive backgrounds. Unfortunately, however as Chakrabarty has recently stated, their aim is still to keep the idea of “difference” alive as the philosophical question of our times, we should start thinking about the relevance of subaltern studies so that it can be restored to its original purpose: expose the true history.

A well known Bangladeshi writer and critic, **Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam** in the essay **“The culture of Subalternity and the New Historiography of Colonial India”** says further about the purpose of SSG,

The Subaltern historiography in South Asia, diligently pursued by the Subaltern Studies Group under the leadership of Ranjit Guha , has projected a deconstructive reading of the ‘un-historical historiography’ of colonialist elites ... The Subaltern studies project attempted to enlarge upon these ‘subordinate ‘currents’ and ‘emergent energies, with a two-fold purpose-to of the history of the dominance and control (nationalism, power, authority, knowledge), and to restore the site where ‘Subaltern consciousness’ is both embedded and has a free play. Subaltern Studies in short, attempt a reversal of nationalistic historical discourse, investing hegemony with subaltern (Islam, 375).

The Subaltern Studies Group investigates the national discourse and points out the hegemony of the ruling class. For reviving subaltern history, the SSG creates a methodology. ‘...oral history text, court and prison, records, police statements, literary texts administrative notes etc....’ (Islam, 375) This is how the Subaltern Studies Group tries to construct subaltern history.

If we turn our eyes from historians to literary critics, what will we find? What do they think of the Subaltern class? Could they give any acceptable solution to destroy subaltern identity? Some scholars take active part for removing the social problem through their literary works. Indian critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak brings this issue in her essay, **“Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988)**. Another writer, Rukmini Bhaya Nair,

...ever, raises the question of subalternity in connection with her project about the accounts of rural woman. Spivak boldly says, ‘The subaltern cannot speak (104.)’ Spivak might in the sense that if someone speaks for the subaltern, nothing fruitful comes out of it. Could Velutha of *The God of small Things* or Om and Ishvar of *A Fine Balance* speak?

### Why can't the Subaltern Speak?

In the essay “**Can the Subaltern Speak?**”, Gayatri Spivak makes two key arguments. Firstly she argues that though the postcolonial studies aim to help the oppressed, they fail to do so. Post colonial studies, Spivak argues, ironically risks re-inscribing colonial imperatives of political domination and cultural exploitation. The post colonial scholars want to help the oppressed, but end up doing the opposite. This happens because they attempt to improve the subalterns’ condition from the outside by granting them collective speech. This attempt creates a situation where the subaltern depends upon western intellectuals to “Speak for them”. Instead of being allowed to speak for themselves, they are spoken for. Furthermore they are treated as a group with a collective cultural identity: the identity of being dispossessed. This situation, Spivak argues, will re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. Because if they are not subordinate, there is no need to speak as a collective group or to be spoken for.

Speaking for the dispossessed, one risk is re-inscribing their marginalization. This takes me to the second argument that Spivak puts forth in her article. I also agree that the subaltern simply cannot speak. Because if you are a subaltern, she argues, no one will listen to you, and if they do, you are not a subaltern anymore. If the two arguments are brought together, it seems as though there is no way whatsoever that the subaltern can be heard. Subalterns can neither speak for themselves nor can anyone else speak for them without re-inscribing their marginalization. Thus, it is, by definition, impossible to speak and be heard from the margins of subalternity.

## Can a Western Writer Speak for the Indian Subaltern Class?

It is a crucial problem as most of the writers often feel that they have to 'Speak for' a group that can not speak for themselves. The goal is to uncover the 'hidden stories' of a group and craft a well-supported argument about the treatment of the group, including possible solutions. The writers have to understand that no single person can be the spokes person for an entire group, even if that person is a part of the group.

The question, Can a western writer speak for the Indian subaltern class? is very relevant in this perspective. In the Preface of the novel, *Untouchable*, E.M Foster says,

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position. By caste he is a Kshatriya, and he might have been expected to inherit the pollution complex. But as a child he played with the children of the sweepers attached to an Indian regiment, he grew to be fond of them, and to understand a tragedy which he did not share. He has just the right mixture of insight detachment, and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth."

(*Untouchable*; vii)

## Authenticity of the Subaltern representation:

The SSG attempts to discover a new but untold history of the Indian subaltern class struggle. The subalterns are always represented by the others' voice, especially by the writers and historians. The representation of the subaltern is always a controversial issue for its authenticity. Every writer represents the subaltern from his own perspective

point of view with special intension, and, thus, there is a chance for being biased and corrupted. Authenticity of subaltern representation remains a debatable issue in the realm of Indian English literature. This issue has received the attention of both the readers and the critics. Most of the Indian English writers are from the upper middle class or middle class society. They portray the subaltern reality according to their own background and point of view. The writers give voice to the poor people who do not have the opportunity to express themselves before the whole nation or world. The writers provide this opportunity to the subaltern class and here the writers play the role of a mediator. But the question is- Can they present Subalterns authentically? There is always a gap between the subaltern and the non-subaltern class. So, it is also questionable, how the writers get the experience or knowledge of the inner world of the subalterns? Do they represent the oppressed section of society without being biased or without any ideological manipulation? There can be intense debate on that because there is no convincing answer for the raised questions regarding the authenticity of subaltern representation.

Although it is not possible to have an exact representation, there are lots of examples of successful portrayal of the struggle and agonies of the subaltern class. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two leaves and a Bud*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and other novels that exhibit the subalterns' turmoil in their inner psychology and their struggle to elevate their social and economic positions. A number of questions can be raised regarding the authenticity of the subaltern portrayal but what Indian writers write is really praiseworthy. They are successful in the portrayal of the subaltern class because the readers are intensely touched by the representation of the subaltern characters. For my case, these novels retain the profound impact on me and the result is that I have chosen this area for my dissertation.

My thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter entitled **The Background History of the Subaltern class: Untouchables/Dalits in India**, gives an overview of India's caste system: the distinction between members of the caste Hindus and those outside the caste system including untouchables, the conceptual difference between the Varnas, the four general classifications of the caste system and the separation between upper castes and lower castes, which are very important for understanding my thesis. The second chapter, **Anand's *Untouchable*: Humiliation and Social injustice for the Untouchables** gives an overview of Mulk Raj Anand's contribution especially on the basis of his first novel, *Untouchable*. The novel is a sensitive document of the inhuman social practices that victimizes the untouchables and lower castes. The chapter shows the suffering and humiliations of untouchables and exhibits the agony and tension of the individuals for being the subalterns. The third chapter, **Mistry's *A Fine Balance*: the Horror of Caste System and the Subaltern Subjectivity** exposes the oppression of lower castes and untouchables. Through Mistry's brilliant representation of two chamaar characters, Ishvar and Omprakash, the chapter shows how the untouchables and lower castes are ostracized and harassed by the upper caste people of India. In chapter four entitled, ***The God of Small Things*: Miserable Plight of Untouchables in India** shows the rigid caste discrimination of India and its effect on the untouchables and lower caste people. Velutha, the protagonist of Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an untouchable paravan whose suffering and humiliations are discussed in this chapter. The fifth chapter, ***The Inheritance of Loss*: A Subaltern Perspective** shows the struggle for survival of the lower class people and their sufferings in abroad.

The appalling plight of the subalterns in all these novels is the result of India's unwillingness to change social cods and prejudices. Appearances have been changed, political set up has been changed but attitudes and mindsets have remained unchanged. The upper caste people nonchalantly practice untouchability and feel none the worse for it. These four novels represent the struggle of the subalterns for their lower positions. The caste system assigns lower positions to the subalterns. They are at the bottom of the



cial pyramid and are utterly unprivileged. For thousands of years they lived and died as  
enials, in conditions worse than that of slaves. There is a well known example in  
story which can be followed to uproot the problem. During the Victorian Era, Charles  
Dickens' novels sensitized the English Society, as nothing else had ever done before, and  
led to the reformation of the institutions and practices that were detrimental to the  
downtrodden. Similarly, an honest discussion of untouchability and caste-based  
discrimination on the global arena would for sure exert enough external pressure on the  
lawmakers and hasten the integration of the subalterns. If apartheid could be dismantled  
by fixing the international gaze relentlessly on it, why can not caste discrimination be  
rooted out by sustained international attention paid to it? And these novels discussed in  
this paper have, I think, made at least a modest contribution to the solution of the  
subaltern issue by raising the upper caste consciousness and by calling the world's  
attention to it. This study also aims to portray the true picture of the subaltern class and  
destroy the caste and class discrimination from India.



## **Chapter-1**

**The Background History of the Subaltern class: Untouchables/Dalits in India**

Without knowing the background and social context of any literary work, it is quite impossible to interpret or justify it's authentically. My thesis explores the subaltern portrayal in some selected Indian novels. In this chapter, I have highlighted the following few basic points about India's caste system: the distinction between members of the caste and those outside the caste system including untouchables (there is a confusion about the inclusion or exclusion of untouchables from the caste system, technically they are outside the four Varnas), the conceptual difference between the Varnas, the four general classification of the caste system and the separation between upper castes and lower castes, and the oppression of Dalits and subalterns which are very important to understand my thesis. Thus, I hope, this chapter must help the readers to understand the authenticity of the subaltern characters of those novels.

## India's Caste System:

The Indian community strictly follows the caste system. Identity in India is largely determined by caste along with class, religion, gender and region. Allison Elliott points out that the origin of caste can be dated back to 1200 BC. Caste encompasses two levels of an integrated system: Varna, the four main categories, and Jati, the multitudinous subdivisions within each Varna. Varna is broadly organized as a four-tiered socio-econo-political system determined by Rig Veda, although not all four varnas are present in every region of India.

The whole of India has traditionally followed a different kind of community (Jati) structure. Caste can be defined as an early system of social grouping distinguished by degrees of purity, social status, and exclusiveness. The word 'caste' is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word 'casta' which means breed, race or kind. Castes are ranked and named considering the individual's birth. According to the Hindu sacred texts of the Rig Veda, there are four main castes and each caste performs a function in sustaining

cial life. Brahmins are the priests; Kshatriyas are the warriors; Vaisyas are the landowners and merchants; and Sudras are artisans and servants (Federal; Research Division 267). At the top of all castes are the Brahmins. In early eras, members of the Brahmin were priests and the educated people. Their primary vocation was to learn the scriptures, teach others and pray for peace, harmony and well being of the people as well as of the whole society. Today, occupations of the Brahmins include doctors, lawyers and teachers. The second Varna is the Kshastriyas: the wealthy aristocrats and rulers of the society. Their chief vocation is to provide security and risk their lives on the battlefield to protect the society. The third Varna is the Vaishyas: the landlords and businessmen. They indulge in economic activities (agrarian & trade) and the lowest caste is the Shudra, the working class and peasants. (Gari Melchers, Mural of Peace, 1996). The division of the castes, at a glance, is as follows:

No.	Name of Caste	Modern Names	Social Task
1	Brahmins	Bourgeoisie/Teacher/Priests.	Planning, Learning, Teaching, and praying.
2	Kshatriyas	Warriors /Soldiers	Maintain security & protect Society.
3	Vaishyas	Landlords, Traders, Business man	Perform economic activity and build economy
4	Shudras	Workers, Peasants, Labours	Perform lower class works.

N.B: There is still a relationship between occupation and Caste in India.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were three different views on caste: (1) the incubus view: caste as a divisive and pernicious force, and a negation of nationhood; (2) The “golden chain” view: caste as varna—to be seen as an ideology of spiritual orders and moral affinities, and a potential basis for national regeneration; (3) The idealized corporation view: caste as jati -- to be seen as a concrete ethnographic fact of Indian life, a source of historic national strengths and organized self-improvement or “uplift” (Bayly 154). In the words of Indira Gandhi, “the original idea of caste is incorporative of the whole Hindu community, about interdependence rather than exclusion or domination” (Dirks 235). Rushdie also points out that “the new element in Indian communalism is the

emergence of a collective Hindu consciousness that transcends caste and believes Hinduism to be under threat from other Indian minorities” (31). However, caste is sometimes used to decry the backwardness of Indian society. Besides, it is seen as a force impeding social equality and the better treatment of women in Indian society.

Within each Varna, several Jatis exist. Members of each jati must follow strict injunctions to remain loyal to their people. The specifications include one's career choices and marriage: each member must marry within his own jat. Even each caste has to perform its assigned duties, responsibilities and privileges without the touch of other castes. For thousand of years the relations amongst the castes and their sub-castes have been governed by religious and moral laws. The most influential of them is a compilation called Manu Dharma Sastra or the Manu Smriti. According to Hindu practice, only the upper castes have the right to study the Vedas. The upper castes alone have the right to the thread ceremony which is performed as a rite of passage, allowing them to be termed twice-born. “If the shudra intentionally listens for committing to memory the Veda, then his ears should be filled with molten lead and lace; if he utters the Veda, then his tongue should be cut off, if he has mastered the Veda his body should be cut off pieces”, says the Manu Smriti. In the Manu Smriti, different punishments are reserved for the same ‘crime’ depending on the different castes. Thus, the caste system of India is very rigid.

The caste system remains a continual battle in India. Though banned by the government, it is still practiced de facto. Nowadays caste politics has also become a debatable issue in India. Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru had different approaches to caste politics and the status of untouchables. Till the mid- 1970s, the politics of Independent India was largely dominated by economic issues and questions of corruption. But since the 1980s, caste has emerged as a major issue in the politics of India. Many political parties in India have openly indulged in caste-based vote bank politics. Thus, the subaltern class, Dalits, Untouchables are the result of caste politics of India.

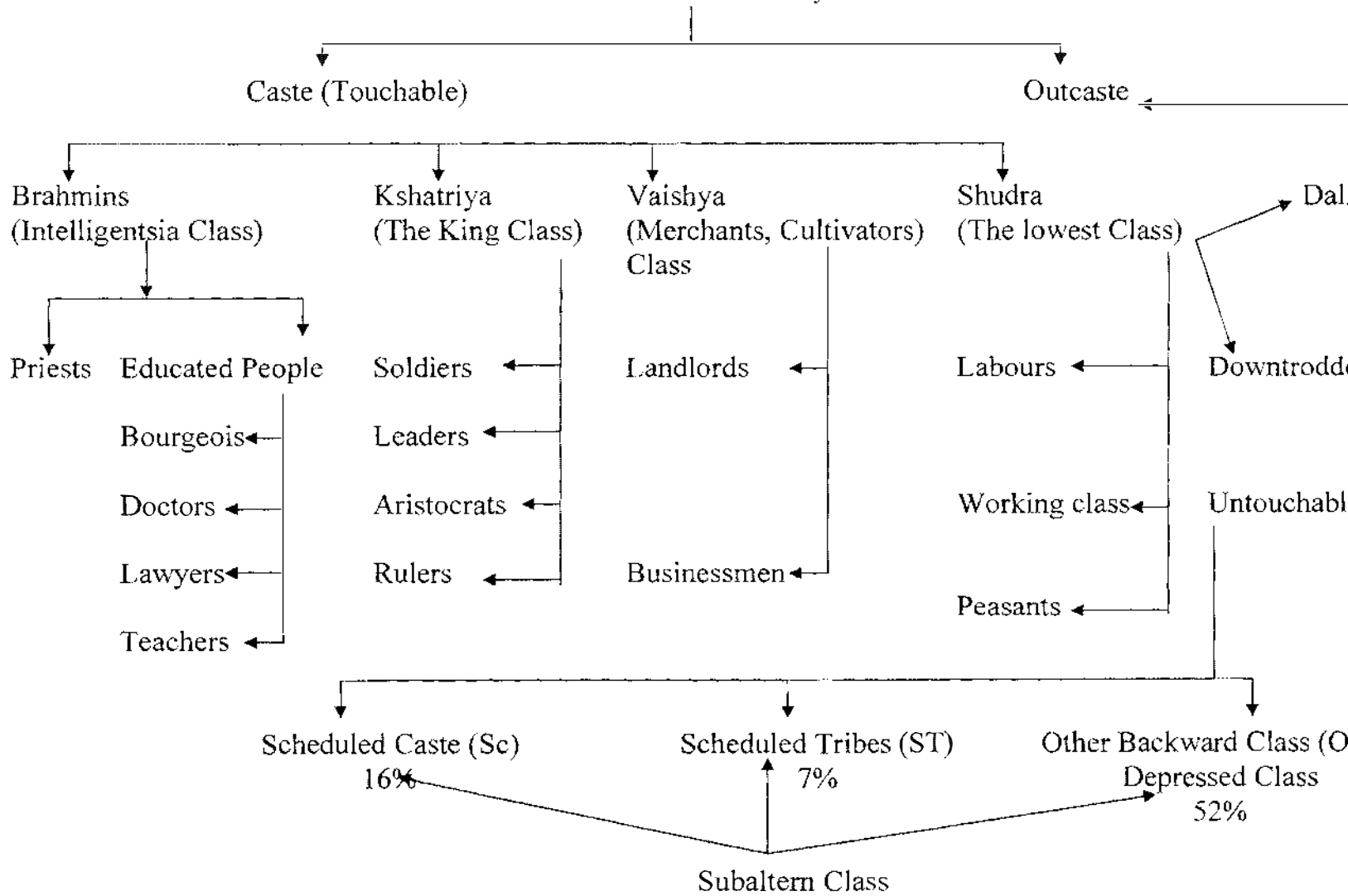


Chart-2

## Who are the Dalits?

Now it is crucial to know, who are Dalits? Dalits are the synonym of subalterns, in a sense. I use this term throughout to refer to the community of people in India who are oppressed by the social mechanism of caste and class and who are consciously resistant to such a practice of inequality. But, there is a wide variety of meanings and connotations that resonate within this single term. James Massey points out that "dalit" is both a noun and an adjective derived from the Sanskrit verbal root "dal". "Dal" means variously to burst, split, crack, or crush. And yet the word is used most frequently to refer to communities of people. The word carries an unspoken, but widely recognized social significance. A nineteenth-century Marathi social reformer, Mahatma Jotirao Phule reportedly first used the term to describe outcastes and untouchables as the broken-down, crushed members of Indian society. But, Massey contends that it is the Dalit Panthers, a short-lived militant arm of the Dalit movement who flourished in the early 1970s, who "gave currency to the term 'dalit' as a constant reminder of their age-old oppression, denoting both their state of deprivation and the people who are oppressed".

Actually, the term 'Dalit' includes all people who are oppressed in Indian society, though not necessarily because of caste. According to 1973's *Dalit Panther Manifesto*, the Dalits are the "members of scheduled castes and tribes, Neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion." Kusum Meghval, in her book, *Dalit Society in Hindi Novels*: says, "The use of 'dalit' society has been accepted for those traditionally thought of as Shudras in India. In dalit society there are those castes who exist on a base level and who have been persecuted for centuries." Thus, the word "dalit" refers to some one individual or some community of people who are oppressed socially, and sometimes emotionally and physically as well.

A large number of populations in India are considered as Dalits. In the 1991 census, Dalit numbered just over 130 million and constituted more than 16% of India's population. Despite some improvements in certain aspects of Dalit life, 90% of them still live in rural areas, and more than 50% are landless labourers. In many parts of India, land is still held by the upper castes and they use the ideology of the caste system to economically exploit low- ranked landless labors (Study Guide-South Asia Reading series).

### **The Oppression of Dalits in India:**

Although the government has made some formal policies to discourage discrimination, the integration of Dalits is not easily accepted because many people are still prejudiced. The programs that have been created are not always being implemented and the Dalits understandably feel discriminated. Most Dalits live in extreme poverty, do not own land and have no opportunity to have better employment and education. Police rarely help because they have their own caste biases. There is a lot of police corruption and if any Dalit dares to complain or try to change the social order by demanding land or asking for a minimum wage they are beaten, harassed and sometimes even murdered. Although India now has a policy of quotas for education and government jobs for Dalits, most are still stuck with menial jobs. Now dalit children can attend school but they have to sit at the back of the classroom and are frequently treated poorly by teachers and students. In every place, they are exploited, discriminated and treated as sub-human beings. Attitudes are slowly changing but caste taboo remains the same. So Dalits continue to fight for their freedom in India. Gandhi's fight for Dalits was very much steeped in Hinduism. He said, "The taint of untouchability is an intolerable burden on Hinduism. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association and on equal footing".

### **What is Dalit Literature?**





Dalit literature is a significant genre of Indian literature. It is relevant to know, what is Dalit literature? Dalit literature is a literary-cultural-political-social movement. It is a body of largely autobiographical essays, short stories, and poetry (novels are only beginning to be published) which flowered in the 1970s under the patronage of the militant political group, the Dalit Panthers. Dalit literature is dominated by themes of untouchability, poverty, social repression, and revolution. It exposes the living conditions of Untouchables to a pan-Indian and, through recent efforts in translation, an increasingly international audience. It is sometimes, the experience of Dalits which is being transcribed into a powerful written form.

Dalit literature continues to provide a space for the creation of a new identity for India's most oppressed people by Dr. Bhimrao Babasaheb Ambedkar. In the literature, through a conscious rewriting of history, religion, and cultural practices, Dalits provide a sense of identity which is organic to their own community. The origin of Dalit literature lies in the political history of the western Indian state of Maharashtra and its language, Marathi. Maharashtra is the birthplace and center of activity for the two founding reformers of the Untouchable resistance movement, Jotirao Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar. Dalit literature appeared in embryo in the form of songs and folk performances during the height of Ambedkar's political and social agitation. Various locales in Maharashtra were the sites of the first major conversions of Untouchables to Buddhism in the wake of Ambedkar's conversion in 1956. Members among the first Dalits, graduated from college in the late 1950s, formed a literary collective called the "Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh" (Dalit Literature Society of Maharashtra) and hosted the first conference on Dalit literature in 1958. The Dalit Panthers were founded in the 1970s by three Marathi poets: Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J.V. Pawar. It has only been in the last thirty years, since the end of the 1970s, that Dalit Literature has seen an increase in other languages and other regions of India.

Many authors of Dalit literature have written reflectively about what Dalit literature is. Dangle writes,

Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion, and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary.

Many Dalit authors consider their literature as a vehicle for expressing the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of a large portion of society. Consequently, their literature is different from the elites' literature which has been written and continues to be written throughout India's history. Dalit writer R.G. Jadhav explains,

Just as it is important to remember that Dalit literature has achieved its distinction as a separate entity mainly on the basis of its social content, it is equally important to bear in mind that this content takes a distinct form with the individual writer and with each of his separate works.

One of the first Dalit writers was, Madara Chennaiah, an 11<sup>th</sup> century cobbler-saint. He is considered as the father of 'Vachana Poetry'. Basavanna(1160) and Dohara Kakkaiah are the early poets of Dalit literature. In the modern era, dalit literature receives its first impetus with the advent of leaders like, Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar who brought forth the issue of Dalits through their works to expose the real history of Dalits and their miserable position in Indian caste based society. By the 1960s, Dalit literature saw a fresh crop of new writers like- Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Shankarao Kharat and so on. The birth of dalit novels has significance in many ways- culturally, historically and ideologically. The dalit novels are enriched with the content and descriptions of Dalit struggles for human dignity. The Dalit novels first came into existence in the late 1990s. The first novel in this period is *Kakibatukulu* that touches the readers in a great extent. The dalit novels are not only of the authentic life experience of dalits but also the

depiction of the agony of dalits by targeting the hegemony of upper castes in society. The celebrated novels which came in the year 2000 are '*Antarani Vasantam*' of G. Kalyan Rao, '*Kakka*' of Vemula Yellain, and '*Panchaman*' of Chilukuri Devaputra and '*Khaki Bhatukula*' of Spartacus (G. Mohan Rao).

These works are significant because they involve a deep exploration of the dalit struggle. The authors have tried to bring out various aspects of dalit struggle of India. They bring out some inhuman practices that affect dalit communities. They have inspired modern writers to deal with dalits, subalterns and untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry and some other modern writers are undoubtedly inspired by those dalit writers.

### **Who are the Untouchables?**

'Untouchables' means the people who are considered as contaminated and not to be touched. Historically, the untouchables have lived under the poorest conditions and received treatment that violets all conceptions of human rights. The untouchables suffer as the 'whipping boys' of Indian society. In Indian caste system, an untouchable, or 'achuta' is a person outside of the four castes and considered below them, whereas, the Dalits include the lower castes. Untouchable is a demeaning term referred to the so-called outcast people of India according to Hindu religion. All others, including foreigners, tribes and nomads who do not subscribe to the norms of the society are untouchables and called 'Mlechhas'. The people who fell outside the four varnas included the group of outcastes now referred to as Untouchables. Thus, an untouchable or an outcaste is a person who does not have any Varna.

Untouchables are generally associated with professions such as leather workers, butchers, launderers, and latrine cleaners, sweepers and general scavengers (Federal Research Division 267). Concept of purity and pollution has a great link with the term

'Untouchable'. For example, a washer man who handles items polluted by blood or human waste, a leatherworker who works with animals skins, a weaver who creates cloth, a person who cremates or buries the dead, a manual scavenger, a carrier of the night soil, an executioner who implements a capital punishment, and the fisher folk in some parts of the country, are all considered untouchables. Some 'Untouchables' eat beef, others eat rats and snakes.

### **The Oppression of Untouchables in India:**

What is the treatment reserved for the 'untouchables' who are outside the caste system and placed even lower than the Shudras in society? Untouchables are considered polluted and not to be touched. They have separate entrances to homes and must drink from separate wells. They are considered to be in a permanent state of impurity. In the 1500s, during the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas in today's Maharashtra state, "untouchables" were not allowed within the gates of the capital city Poona between 9 am and 3 pm because during this time their bodies were likely to cast long shadows and the shadow of an 'untouchable' might fall on the Brahmins and pollute them. An 'untouchable' has to carry an earthen pot around his neck so his spittle may not pollute the earth. In Maharashtra an 'untouchable' wears a black thread either around his neck or on his wrist for ready identification, while in Gujarat a horn has to be worn for identification. They are denied entry into temples; they are not allowed to share community wells; they are forced to drink water from separate glasses and they are frequently attacked or abused by the upper castes. When they go past an upper caste house, they have to walk and push the bicycle rather than ride it. While walking in front of a powerful upper caste man's house, they take off their foot wear till they clear the exclusion zone. The police are reluctant to register their complaints or investigate cases filed by them. The greatest injustice to the untouchables is though they have the intelligence, ambition, and qualification to rise above their social classification, they are not given the chance. In the Hindu religion (as well as in society), one can not break or rise above his/her caste or untouchability as the bloodline is the final and deciding

factor. This harsh law is still practiced by many people in the current era. The Untouchables are the truly deprived people of Hindu society.

The 'untouchables' constitute 15% of the total population of the sub-continent and have been categorized into three sub-groups: scheduled castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Depressed classes or Other Backward classes (OBC).

### **Scheduled Castes (SC):**

Scheduled Castes generally consist of former "untouchables" (the term 'Dalit' is now preferred). Now, 16% of the total population of India is SC, i.e. around 160 million. Since 1935, untouchables have been called "Scheduled Castes". They were also named "Harijan" (The children of God) by Mahatma Gandhi. More recently these groups refer to themselves as Dalits, a self designation for untouchables of low caste. The term was also used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of "depressed classes", a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. The term comes from the writings of the Dalit Panthers, a radical Dalit rights movement founded in 1972 in the state of Maharashtra. The Dalit Panthers revived the term in their 1993 manifesto and expounded its referents to include the Scheduled tribes, Neo- Buddhists, working people, landless and poor peasant women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Thus, the term SC in a broader sense, encompasses all those who are down- trodden and crushed underfoot.

### **Scheduled Tribes (ST):**

Scheduled tribes are the tribal groups. Present population of ST is 7% of the total population of India i.e. around 70 million.

### **Other Backward Classes (OBS):**

The Mandal Commission includes more than 3000 castes under OBS Category and marks that the OBSs are around 52% of the total population of India. However, the

National Sample Survey puts the figure at 32%. There is substantial debate over the exact number of OBSs in India.

Untouchability is not unique to India; it was practiced in parts of Europe until a few centuries ago, and Japan still has a large number of ‘Untouchables’ called the ‘burakumin’. But it is in the Indian sub-continent that this system survives, closely bound with culture, religion, history and contemporary politics. Though ‘untouchability’ is now illegal in India, today over 170 million men, women and children in the India are considered untouchables. The problem of untouchability is more than an issue of law and order – it is a deep rooted, millennia –old malady that affects society. Thus, ‘untouchable’ writers like Gruuam Joshua (1895 - 1971), as well as Humanist writers like the recently departed Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and so on, have taken the responsibility to make people aware about this oppressive religious ideology through their writings.



## Chapter-2

### **Anand's *Untouchable*: Humiliation and Social Injustice for the Untouchables**



*Untouchable*



‘Polluted, Polluted, Polluted.’ A shout rang through the air. He was completely unnerved. His eyes were covered with darkness. He couldn’t see anything. His tongue and throat were parched. He wanted to utter a cry, a cry of fear, but his voice failed him. He opened his mouth wide to speak. It was no use. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. He tried to raise himself from the awkward attitude of prostration, but his limbs had no strength left in them. (Anand’s *Untouchable*: pg-52).

Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) is a practical document of inhumanity and injustice of the lower caste people of India. Caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability bring a lot of suffering for the Indian subaltern class. The practice of untouchability is a strong ideology of the upper castes and it becomes very difficult for the lower caste Hindus to get rid of it. The protagonist of *Untouchable*, Bakha has also fallen into the same pattern. The novel describes a day in a sweeper’s life and shows how the lower castes and untouchables are victimized, humiliated and oppressed in their everyday life. The life of a lower caste Hindu is more painful than the life of a slave in India’s society. The novel shows the pain and agony of Bakha for being an untouchable. The untouchables are inborn sufferers, discriminated and hatred.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great humanist writer. Most of his novels- *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937)), *The Village Trilogy - The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* (1945)- deal with the underprivileged sections of Indian society. In the novel, *Untouchable* he brings an untouchable protagonist to show the horror of India’s caste system and to attain the upper castes’ attention. For the realistic presentation of the social and economic problems of the subalterns in the rigid caste system and British colonial rule, Anand is considered by many critics as one of the best writers. The value of his books according to Margaret Berry, “is the witness they offer of India’s agonizing attempt to break out of massive stagnation and create a society in which men and women are free and equal.” Krishna Nandan Sinha has also remarked, “While



the later novels retain the passion for social justice, they sound greater emotional depths.” Anand reflects his vision of progressive humanism for all the downtrodden people of India through his all novels.

Caste discrimination is a hateful practice in India. The lower castes and untouchables are considered innately polluted. There is no chance to remove the stigma of untouchability or raise their positions. All the scornful tasks are preserved for them. They cannot change their jobs accordingly. Until death they have to do the same service that their fathers and forefathers did. They are more victimized than the slaves. The inhuman practices of the society are represented in the novel in a realistic manner. The evidence of realism can be identified from the reaction of E.M Forster. He has written in the **Preface** to the novel, *Untouchable*,

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion.  
(Preface-vi)

What Forster argues is true in a sense because a slave can be free from slavery if he wants but there is no chance to escape from the curse of untouchability for the lower caste Hindus. In the novel, *Untouchable*, Bakha wants to escape from the identity of a sweeper and improve his social position through the mimicry of British Soldiers and their lifestyle.

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, *Untouchable*, expresses the inhuman and oppressive practices of upper caste Indians in a realistic manner. Bakha's struggle starts from the sun rise of the day and continues day long. He is woken in the early morning by his father's shouts. The first task of the day is to clean the latrines before the rest of the

community gets up to use those. Even when Bakha sleeps in, he is chided by the local Hindu men who want to use the toilet. Bakha takes this customary abuse as his legal gain for being an untouchable and cleans the toilets one after another. He never gets love or sympathy but is chided continuously. He is called by such names as 'illegally begotten', 'scoundrel', 'rogue of Bakhe', 'son of a bitch', 'wanton', 'dirty dog' and so on. Bakha is humiliated by the local upper castes as Anand mentions, "Oh, Bakhya! Oh, Bakhya! Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clear a latrine for me! someone shouted from without." (Page-7)

Bakha expresses 'human enslavement, subjugation and oppression' in India's caste based society. Anand shows man's inhumanity to fellow man through the character of Bakha. In India untouchables are the rejected, disinherited and helpless victims. They are always considered as contaminated and polluted. They don't even get the liberty to walk with the upper castes. When Bakha's father becomes ill and Bakha has to go to the city to sweep the roads and the courtyard, on the way he inadvertently touches with an upper caste fellow. It brings the most humiliation and hatred for him. Anand says,

'Keep to the side of the road, you, low-caste vermin! he suddenly heard someone shouting at him. 'Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!' Page-38

There is no liberty or justice for the untouchables in India. They are born to be kicked and abused. Anand's intention is to portray the miserable plight of the lowest castes, workers, peasants and labourers of the society. Bakha is treated as an animal rather than a human being. He becomes the symbol of "dehumanization and human subjugation". In the city road, after inadvertently touches the fellow, he is tortured in such a way that one might think he has committed an unpardonable sin. Anand mentions, "But the crowd which pressed round him, staring, pulling grimaces, jeering

and leering, was without a shadow of pity for his remorse. It stood unmoved, without heeding his apologies," (page-40).

India's caste system is very rigid and full of prejudices. There are so many restrictions for the lower castes. At every step, they have to follow the restrictions. If they make any mistake, it is considered as a sin. From the age of Gandhi to Ambedkar, untouchability is still practiced. Even the touch of an untouchable can pollute the upper castes. So the untouchables have to shout a warning while passing, as Bakha does on the city street. Anand says, "A little later he showed down, and quite automatically he began to shout: 'Posh keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming!'" (page-42). It is really an inhuman and hateful practice of the upper caste Hindus.

As a humanist writer Anand fights for social justice and equality for the subalterns. In India the subaltern children can not attend the same school with the upper caste children. Anand has written the novel, *Untouchable* to expose the social injustice and ensure the basic rights and equality for the subaltern class. In this novel, Bakha's burning desire is to go to school and become a sahib. But his father "had told him that schools are meant for the babus, and not for the lowly sweepers." Bakha has been painfully aware of the absurdity and cruelty of the upper-caste Hindus who have openly and boldly embraced the tradition of untouchability. Anand says, "Later still he realized that there was no school which would admit him because the parents of the other children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low-caste man's son." (Page -30)

# shame



Nadu, going down to clear a choked drain with minimum equipment. (Right) In the same city, a public facility that is cleaned manually.



Not only he but also his sister, brother and father are the victims of the racial domination of India. Every treatment of untouchables is so painful that the whole story becomes unbearable. Most of the times, the upper class men, like the priest of the temple Pundit Kali Nath, receive the advantages from the outcastes but hate and count them impure. The priest sexually harasses Sohini when Sohini goes to the temple to work. Ironically, the temple priest, overpowered by his sexual desire for Bakha's sister Sohini, must have been terribly confused about the meaning of the words "purity" and "defilement." Evidently, Anand has placed the entire problem of the soul's purity and impurity in the evil class structure. In the name of religion, they practice prejudices. Anand shows the evil excitement of the upper caste Hindus when Bakha is caught as a sinner in the city street. Anand depicts the situation as,

‘Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!’ shouted the Brahmin below. The crowd above him took the cue and shouted after him, waving their hands, some in fear, others in anger, but all in a terrible orgy of excitement. (pg-53).

Anand investigates the issue of untouchability with the experience and realization of Bakha's father, Lakha. Lakha says, ‘We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us’. Thus, the untouchables take the humiliation as granted. In a trenchant criticism of the caste system, Forster wrote,

“.....they [Indians] have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west: the belief that the products [human excreta] are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant, and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them are outcastes from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it. As one of Mr. Anand's characters says, ‘They think we are dirt because we clean their dirt.’(Preface-vi)

E.M. Forster praises Anand for his sharper power of observation of Indian social reality, probably better than that of his own in *A Passage to India*.

Bakha helps people clean their bodies, but he does not understand how his touch pollutes those who profess purity by birth. What manifests in the minds of the upper-class majority is the fear of intermingling and of the probable loss of inherited purity. The upper castes believe some religious dogmas and continue inhuman practices based on those. According to Hinduism, untouchables can pollute others from a distance. When Bakha reaches near the temple, he is abused by the other worshippers. Anand says,

‘You people have only been polluted from a distance’, .... The distance, the distance! the worshippers from the top of the steps were shouting. ‘A temple can be pulled according to the Holly Books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. (Page – 53)

There is a very frustrating scene, when Bakha brings a child to his mother. The child has been wounded in the head by a stick during a hockey game. When Bakha takes him, the mother grabs the child from him and she abuses him for having “touched” her boy. His love and innocence becomes a cause of shame and insult for Bakha. The mother abuses him instead of blessings. For this reason Bakha’s mental pain becomes more acute than his physical punishment. The mother curses and humiliates Bakha unjustly. Actually there is no justice for the untouchables. Anand depicts the scene very vividly. He expresses,

‘Oh, you eater of your masters! What have you done? You have killed my son! She wailed, flinging her hands across her breasts and turning blue and red with fear. ‘Give him to me!! Give me my child! You have defiled my house, besides wounding my son!’ .... ‘Get away, get away, you eater of your masters!’ She shouted at him. ‘May you die!’ (Page-106).

The outcastes always suffer from psychological pressure. The humiliation and the oppression increase their mental agony to a great extent. They feel their existence as the burden of life. Bakha as a sweeper expresses his agony: "... I am a sweeper, sweeper - untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!"(43). Why are the untouchables always abused? Bakha finds the answer: 'Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high-castes.' (Page-43)

Apparently Bakha imitates the English but deep down there is a great desire to become superior so that he can turn in to the dominator from the dominated. Bakha tries ironically to escape the humiliation and suffering through mimicry of the British. He yearns after the British soldiers' clothes, one of their hats, their style, and their language. He wants so much to learn the hockey stick. In fact, Britishness is for him the way out of untouchability. The mimicry of Bakha can be seen from two perspectives. One is from a larger point of view which is between the British colonizer and the Indian colonize. The other angle is within the Indians and that is between the upper class Hindus and lower class Hindus. Here, Bakha desires to become the English for enjoying their superior position and power. He does not wish to become an upper class man because the English are superior to the upper class Hindus.

Bakha tries to escape from the curse of untouchability. He attempts to have access in every possible and available way around him. But he finds three ways. One is mimicking the British. Second is converting to Christianity and the third is following Gandhi's ideology and activities. At the end, Bakha understands that it is better to follow Gandhi because the influence of Gandhi and his philosophy can help him to get rid of untouchability. However, he finds the real answer in technology. Forster wrote "No good is needed to rescue the Untouchables, no vows of self- sacrifice and abnegation on the part of more fortunate Indians but simply and solely- the flush system. Introduce water

closets and main drainage throughout India, and all this rubbish about untouchability will disappear.” (Preface-viii)

After reading *Untouchable* it becomes crucial to ask, Can untouchables be "free from the stigma of untouchability"? It seems very heavy when Bakha asks the question, "shall I never be able to leave the latrines?"(147). The poet decreases Bakha's agony by describing the efficacy of the machine: "Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of casteless and classless society" (146). But the poet's resplendent vision of the abolition of untouchability and the formation of civil society is dependent on industrialization and the full application of modernity when he puts these words in Anand's mouth: "In fact, greater efficiency, better salesmanship, more mass production, standardization, dictatorship of the sweepers, Marxian materialism and all that!" (146). Anand wants to see a 'casteless and classless society. He wants to remove the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination. He wants to provide 'human identity' without justifying caste or class. That is why he takes the unprivileged section of the society as the major theme of his novels.

All the protagonists of Anand's novels as, Bakha, Munoo, Lalu, , Gangu are the victims of upper caste oppression. Anand intentionally selects these lower class characters.

“My novels," remarks Anand, "were intended to be different from those of others, departures from the upper and middle section fictions." "I wished to recreate," he adds, "the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed, [and] repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature except in Sarat Chatterji, Prem Chand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and Maneck Bannerji.”

(The Sources of Protest: 46).



Bakha is a universal representative of all untouchables. In *Untouchable*, Anand declares, "I meant to recreate the lives of the millions of untouchables through a single person" (qtd. in Rajan 102). The words, 'sweeper', 'untouchable', 'coolie', 'tea garden labor' and so on are used to raise the feeling of shame and disgust. There is no doubt that Anand experiences subaltern reality to a great extent in order to portray all these subaltern characters. India's caste based society is such cruel to the subaltern class people as the Dante's hell. The question can be raised, who are really impure or polluted? In "**Culture and Anarchy**" Matthew Arnold remarks that the aristocrats are the barbarians and the bourgeois are the philistines. In the perspective of India, how can the upper castes(the barbarians and the philistines) be pure or unpolluted? Anand's intention is to raise the untouchables' position as Gandhi remarks them the Harijians, the sons of God.

The novel, *Coolie*, has a wider canvas of the subalterns' struggle. It illustrates Anand's compassion and concerns for the poor of India. In *Coolie* he portrays the life of young Munoo, Kshatriya by caste but a peasant boy who travels from his mountainous village through north India and eventually finds himself in Bombay. Munoo for being an orphan is forced to take whatever work he can do to survive. He works a variety of odd jobs as a servant, in a mine factory and as a coolie at Daulatpur, Bombay and Simla till he dies at 15 years old of tuberculosis brought by undernourishment. Munoo is exploited not because of his caste but of his poverty. In each of his working places Munoo is subjected, harassed, and financially exploited by the employers, moneylenders and the so-called authorities.

Munoo has gone through different positions before embracing death. It must be noted that the last two stages of Munoo's journey conclusively show that the British colonial governance of India is largely responsible for the creation and perpetuation of slavery, poverty and suffering. Anand represents Munoo to show a vivid picture of human misery, exploitation, starvation, poverty and disease. Not only Bakha, but also the whole subaltern class does very hateful jobs. For instance, the incantation uttered by

the Bombay coolies, "We belong to suffering! We belong to suffering!" (Coolie:215). Munoo, being a Kshatriya by birth, does not carry the same baggage of untouchability as does Bakha. But Anand has successfully shown that his struggle ends the same way as that of other subalterns. The fact remains the same, that both, Bakha and Munoo are slaves, tragic figures of history because they are unable to free themselves from the repressive tyranny of history and tradition. Bakha's world of desire remains repressed just as Munoo's unborn dream-world is permanently buried in the earth.

In the novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), Anand continues his exploration of the Indian society. He portrays the plight of the labourers in a tea plantation in Assam. The story is about a poor Punjabi peasant. He is brutally exploited in a tea plantation and killed by a British official, who tries to rape his daughter. 'Every corner of the garden, two leaves and a bud of the tea trees, the shade shrubs are the silent witness of the oppression and agony of the poor Punjabi laborer who stands as the insignia of the oppressed class'. With its apt title, therefore the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* stands as a moving document of the sufferings of the tea laborers.

All of Anand's novels call for equality, liberty and justice, and for basic human rights in India. The novels show realistic examples of the harsh treatment of untouchables and lower castes. The novels can be considered as the holy books of the untouchables for Anand's humanism. In fact, Anand maintains that the new humanism must include the fundamental human values of "the Buddhist karuna or compassion, bhakti and truth and deep commitment to the ideal of human dignity".

“‘SHAMEFUL’, ‘degrading’, ‘dehumanizing’, ‘disgusting’, ‘obnoxious’, ‘abhorrent’, a ‘blot on humanity’ –these are some of the words used to describe ‘manual scavenging.’” In India, Manual scavengers and sweepers are called ‘Han, Hadi, Balmiki, dhanuk, Methar or Mehtar, Bhangi, Paki, Thitti, Madiga, Mira, Lalbegi, Chura, Balashah

and so on in different languages, but they are invariably considered 'untouchables'. Without exception, all of them are Dalits, do the meanest jobs and live miserable lives like other 'untouchables' of India. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrine (Prohibition) act was passed in 1993. Says Wilson: "It took another decade for some States to adopt it. Some States refuse to adopt the law, saying that they don't have any manual scavengers, while some states adopted the law only when the Supreme Court interferes on the matter. How can the Indians solve the problem of untouchability unless they first admit that the problem exists?"

Anand calls for a society where castes would no longer inflict pain on one another. Untouchability is an inhuman practice and exposes the deformation of human dignity. It will take more time for the powerful writers, thinkers and politicians to destroy untouchability and caste discrimination since Gandhi has been powerless to eradicate the problem. But, it will not take years to change 'beast into angel, but man into man'. If everyone believes in God, he/she should not belittle any one of His best creatures. Anand wants to make the upper castes of Hindu society as well as all readers to aware of the subalterns' predicament.



## Chapter-3

### **Mistry's *A Fine Balance*: the Horror of Caste System and the Subaltern Subjectivity**



“Rohinton Mistry”



Doctorji, please do the operation on me, I will be grateful, but please leave out my nephew, Doctorji, his name is Omprakash and his wedding is happening soon, please listen to me, Doctorji, I beg of you!....Cut me as much as you like! But forgive my nephew! His marriage is being arranged!....No one took notice of Ishvar's crying; grief and tears were general throughout the tents....“Everything is ruined”, he wept....“Our family name will die without children, it is the end of everything – everything is lost!”

(Ishvar wails to save Om's manhood; **A Fine Balance**: pp-651-652)

The Dalit/Subaltern struggle is a dominant theme of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*. The novel exposes the subaltern subjectivity in Postcolonial India during Indira Gandhi's Emergency (1975-1977). It is a real historiography of the marginalized Dalit community that shows how Dalits are victimized by unfair social structures of India. In the novel, Mistry exposes the Independent India, after 30 years of its partition, at the time of State Emergency. The story follows the fortunes of two untouchables, Ishvar and his nephew, Omprakash, during the Emergency, since they move from their village to a city (Mumbai) to seek work. Mistry depicts the terrible struggles of the subaltern class through these two characters. He also shows the brutalities of caste system, appalling poverty, religious intolerance and absurd Emergency of India in the novel. Mistry through the novel, shows his profound consciousness for the subaltern class of India. A critic says, “Mistry is a master blender of the picaresque and the tragic..... To say that he captures the textures of India well and creates larger-than-life characters is to note the least of his achievements. If anything, his success is to make life seem so much less a task for the novelist enthralling”.

*A Fine Balance* is an authentic documentary of India's reality and of the oppressed and dispossessed. It shows the horror of the caste system of India. Guardian, an Indian critic remarks, *A Fine Balance* is “a masterpiece of illumination and grace. Like all good fiction, it transforms our understanding of life.” Rohinton Mistry, Indian by birth, no

an Indian Canadian. *A Fine Balance* was published twenty years after he left Bombay his birth place, when he has returned only to visit, but Mistry finds no difficulty summoning up the city. He explains, "When you have grown up in one place and spend the first 23 years of your life there – that's how old I was when I left it is almost though you are never going to be removed from that place". That is why, he could move beyond the focus on Parsi life that has preoccupied him in his previous novel, *Sukra Long Journey* (1991) and feature the Indian lower caste nation at the time of 'State Emergency (1975-77)'.

Ishvar and Omprakash's family is a part of the chammaar caste that traditionally cures leather and is considered untouchable. Ishvar's father, Dukhai Mochi, was a cobbler and leather-worker. When he was given or purchased a dead buffalo or cow, he would skin the carcass, eat the meat with his family and tan the hide and turn it into goods such as sandals and whips. In an attempt to break the restrictive caste system that is set to oppress the lower castes, Ishvar's father apprentices his sons to be tailors by a Muslim friend, Ashraf. Narayan then turns to the village setting up his own business and his son Omprakash being sent to join his unmarried uncle, Ishvar and Ashraf chacha, to train as a tailor. But Om and Ishvar lose their entire family when a vindictive upper caste landlord burns their homes. Following this, Ishvar and Om go to Bombay, to make some money before returning home again and plan to set up their own tailoring business. In the city, tyranny becomes their regular fare. The horror of Emergency falls on them. Bulldozers have fallen on slum-dwellings in the name of the "Government Beautification" program. Ishvar and Om find a way for dwelling in the streets, under the awning of a pharmacy. But they are soon rounded up and driven out of the city along with a bunch of beggars, to provide cheap (free) labour to an irrigation project (another outcome of civic beautification scheme) as well as to eradicate pavement dwellers. Their suffering ends when they lose everything, even their manhood. In the novel Mistry brings out, with devastating effect, the unbelievable levels of cruelty that human can inflict upon their fellow men. Chopping hands, pouring molten lead in to ears, shooting at the top of the head and so on have become the common punishment for the subaltern class.

The inhumanity towards the lower castes still exists and will continue in India's caste based society unless the issue is dealt strictly.

Rohinton Mistry's fictional work, *A Fine Balance*, itself is a unique history of the Indian subaltern class. Indian democracy offers liberty and equality just for the elite and upper caste Hindus. The lower caste people are deprived of their democratic rights and survive under caste-based-laws which are totally prejudiced and inhuman. In the name of poverty alleviation, the State Emergency brings inhuman suffering and humiliation for the subaltern class. Mistry's intention is to explore the real history of India and show how an Emergency can be destructive for the poor people instead of ensuring better opportunities for them. In fact, by depicting the struggles of the two untouchable characters, during the Emergency, the author succeeds in conveying his point of view. The author informs as well as warns the readers that the horrors that follow the untouchable characters in Mumbai are not local, but are national for the whole underprivileged community. The suffering of Ishvar and Om confirms the readers that for the marginal people, "Living each day is to face one emergency or another". Mistry expresses the most horrifying facts of the Emergency and the oppression of the lower sections of society, which have only been partially and superficially covered by the historians.

Gandhi's steps for ensuring human equality and abolishing the caste system are praiseworthy but Mistry finds everything as horrible as it was in Gandhi's era. Mistry's novel makes it abundantly clear that social domination, caste discrimination, subaltern subjectivity and dalit oppression are responsible, to a great extent, for the poverty of India. The untouchables and lower castes are always oppressed by the upper caste people. They have no freedom to choose their own occupations. For this reason, they stay ever poor. Mistry depicts the landowners' and masters' brutality vividly. Mistry shows the brutality of Thakur Premji, the upper-caste landowner to Dukhi, Ishvar's father when he has gone for pounding chillies. He is beaten and his wages are confiscated because the

mortar used for pounding has split in two. In another instance, the young Ishvar and his brother Narayan are excluded from school under caste regulations and endure physical punishment for stealing into the classroom. The brutality of the teacher is really hateful. Mistry says,

“You Chamaar rascals! Very brave you are getting, daring to enter the school!” He twisted their ears till they yelped with pain and started to cry. The schoolchildren fearfully huddled together... Holding on to Narayan, he slapped Ishvar six times in quick succession across the face, then delivered the same number to his brother’s face. (Pp.130-131)

Mistry shows the social injustice and oppression of untouchables in a very realistic way. When Dukhi ask for justice, Pandit Lalluram increases his agony by saying,

“Your children entered the classroom. They polluted the place. They touched instruments of learning. They defiled slates and chalks, which upper-caste children would touch. You are lucky there wasn’t a holy book like the Bhagavad Gita in that cupboard, no sacred texts. Or the punishment would have been more final.” (Pg-134)

It is one sort of cruelty of Indian society that the children of the lower caste can not attend the same school with the upper caste children. The lower castes are considered as impure, polluted and contaminated. Mistry represents the cruelty to exclude the practice by attaining our attention.

Mistry’s characters, Ishavar and Omprakash, are Untouchables. In the village they are oppressed and discriminated by the upper castes in a severe way. Narayan, Omprakash’s father, has challenged the corrupt electoral practices that effectively disenfranchised the Untouchable caste. For this reason, he and his friends are tortured to death by the local leader Thakur Dharamsi. He is not satisfied with that but orders to burn Narayan’s home and murder his family. The burning scene as Mistry depicts expresses the brutality and inhumanity of the upper castes. Nothing can be so barbarous; nothing can be so brutal as burning all members of a family alive. Mistry depicts the horror and agony:



Dukhi, Roopa, Radha, and the daughters were bound and dragged into the main room. "Two are missing," said Thakur Dharamsi. "Son and grandson". "Someone checked around, and informed him that they were living in town. "Well, never mind, these five will do." ... But the sound of grief soon mingled with the family's death agony; the house was set alight. The first flames licked at the bound flesh. The dry winds, furiously fanning the fire, showed the only spark of mercy during this night. The blaze swiftly enfolded all six of them. (Pp.177-178)

Narayan's murder by Thakur Dharamsi expresses the illegal power practice of the upper castes Zamindaars and Thakurs. In the name of democracy, they practice brutality, inequality and subjectivity. As Narayan seeks for democratic equality, Thakur Dharamsi by burning his family teaches the horrible lesson to the entire subaltern class to stop them for ever from asking for liberty, equality or any sort of justice.

The murder of that Chamaar family in 1969 or 1970 has got similarity with the murder in 1981 that has exposed by M.J. Akbar in his book *Riot after Riot*:

In the autumn of 1981, Harijans were killed in several villages in Uttar Pradesh. Two of these massacres, one in Delhi, followed by another a few days later in Sarhupur – received widespread publicity. The killers, who were Thakur Rajputs, had just one message to send through murder – the untouchable Jatav cobblers had to learn their place in society and the caste hierarchy. (Akbar: 45)

Mistry shows the oppressive policies of the Emergency and those of the caste system vividly in the novel. They are sent forcefully to a construction site as free labour. Mistry here invokes shades of slavery. According to Indian caste politics, the subalterns should always agree with the upper castes' order and they should forever live like slaves. In the ditch digging project, they are tortured inhumanly. Mistry expresses their suffering:

By the end of the first week, Ishvar and Om felt they had spent an eternity in this hell. They were barely able to rise for the dawn whistle. Dizzy spells made the world dance around them when they got out of bed. Their morning steadied somewhat after their glass of strong, over-boiled tea. They staggered through the day, listening to the bewildering threats and insults of overseers and paid workers. They fell asleep early in the evening, cradled in the scrawny lap of exhaustion. (Pg-435)

In India, the subalterns are deprived of their basic rights. Mistry shows the insecurity of the subalterns' life. The Emergency even snatches the dwelling right of the lower class people. Ishvar and Om after leaving their village, move from door to door for a place to live and work. On their arrival in the city, the tailors are permitted to sleep on the back pavement of someone's shop. After finding employment with Dina, they are encouraged by their host to rent a hut in the slums, but immediately it is razed to the ground by the Beautification brigade. For sleeping in public places, they are caught and suffer a lot. The subalterns are like refugees in India. Ishvar and Om's village home has been burnt and at the city they run like nomads. They are precisely what Gadgil and Gulabani (1995) would call "ecological refugees."

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry bitterly criticizes the Emergency for its brutality towards the subalterns. In the name of bringing peace for all Indians, it brings hateful reformation schemes as, "forced sterilizations and vasectomies by sinister Family Planning clinics and distribution of free radio transistors, the city Embellishment program, 'Remove THE Poor, Save the country' and the elimination of slums to make way for Five Star Hotels or more lucrative designs, the 'Maintenance of Internal Security Act' (MISA)" that allow detention without trial, up to two years, and so on. Ironically, no one of the schemes can improve the subalterns' life rather bring inhuman disaster for them.



The most horrifying act of the Emergency and its impact on the subaltern class are felt extremely by the main protagonists, Ishvar and Omprakash. After being rescued from the camp of the City Embellishment programme by the Beggar Master, the leader of a band of beggars, Ishvar and Om are forcibly picked up from the town square (where they had gone to find a bride for Om) to fulfill the daily quota of sterilizations. The operations are done in less than sanitary conditions and Ishvar's legs then become affected with gangrene and both his limbs have to be amputated. The description is horrific as the author mentions, "From the groin to the knee the flesh had become. Black" (P 530). The upper caste political leader of the village, Thakur Dharamsi, is not happy up to this much but directs the doctor to operate upon Om too, who is a mere youth, waiting to get married. There is no way to escape from this vicious forced sterilization scheme. At the end, the project for genocide occurs through more subtle methods when Ishvar and Omprakash are forced to undergo botched vasectomies that leave one crippled and the other castrated. There can be nothing horrific than this sort of brutality. The subalterns have nothing as their own. At last they sacrifice their manhood and become the living dead entities. After losing manhood, Ishvar expresses his extreme agony:

"... What kind of life, what kind of country is this, where we cannot come and go as we please? Is it a sin to visit my native place? To get my nephew married?" He could walk no further, and sank to the pavement, shaking. (Page-659)

Mistry shows that both, the authoritative power and social structure are responsible for the sufferings of the subaltern class. The oppressive power practice of Thakur Dharamsi, Ishvar and Om fail to raise their social position and ensure economic freedom. Since Mistry's untouchable characters turn into beggars at the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the untouchable and the beggar are different manifestations of the same condition. At least the Indian society should give freedom to select their own work or else everybody will be affected. Mistry shows how Om and Ishvar are eager to change their identity of chammaar and how they eager to raise their social position by tailoring

But it is the hateful social law that always dominates the subalterns. Mistry shows the most emotional condition by portraying Ishvar and Om as beggar. The scene is so touching that every reader must cry to perceive their disastrous condition. Mistry shows, "One sat slumped on a low platform that moved on castors. He had no legs. The other pulled the platform with a rope slung over his shoulder." (Page -740)



Picture: Beggars of India. Not only Ishvar and Om but also thousands of Indian subalterns beg to survive their lives.

According to Mistry's presentation, the Hindu upper castes are responsible for the poverty of the subaltern class. They neither help nor allow the lower castes to switch from their inherent work and change their social position. In Anand's *Untouchable*, Bakha tries to escape from the stigma of untouchability by mimicking the British. In the novel, *The God of Small Things*, Velutha, a Christian by birth but a paravan tries to remove his identity through his love affair with a higher caste woman called Ammu. In the same way, Biju of *The Inheritance of Loss* struggles to earn money and change his social position. But, all the characters, Ishvar and Om, Velutha, Bhaka and Biju fail to improve their social position or status for the cruelty of upper castes Hindus. As long as the upper class people remain rigid on caste discrimination, the subaltern will not be able to raise their position and remove the stigma of subalternity.

The issue of economy is an important factor for the subaltern class as Rohinton Mistry shows in *The Fine Balance*. He says that the economic exploitation should be stopped as early as possible in order to ensure the right of survival for the subaltern class. Ambedkar also explores the issue of economic injustice towards the subaltern class. He says,

Untouchability is more than a religious system. It is also an economic system which is worse than slavery.... As an economic system it permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation. (Ambedkar).

Mistry seems to be an expert in selecting names based on character portrayal. Mistry selects the name of the characters considering their status. He has given the name "Dukhi" to the head of that chammaar family. By using the name "Dukhi", Mistry wants to evoke sympathy and pity for the character. It is important to mention that 'Dukhi' is the name of the protagonist of Premchand's short story, *Sadgati (Deliverance)*. The name symbolizes the mental agony of the untouchables. Dukhi is a 'Bengali' and also a Hindi

word which means ‘Unhappy’ in English. The untouchables are really unhappy for their whole life for being deprived of love, sympathy, and basic needs.

The law and police department of India are not willing to protect the right of the subalterns and untouchables as much as of the upper castes and the elite class. The domination of the subalterns remains unchanged. The government passes new laws but in reality the laws do not protect the lower class people; rather the laws disfavour and harass them. Mistry portrays the social discrimination which should have been eliminated from the postcolonial India but ironically has not happened so. The adroitness of Rohinton Mistry can be seen in the attempt of intermingling the national politics and the subalterns’ struggle of postcolonial India. How national unrest situation and political turmoil affect the lower caste people is exhibited with the reality of independent India. Apparently, the State makes laws to regulate the dominant power and empower the lower castes. The actual fact is that all laws and documented rights of the citizens (rule of law and the equal rights) cannot ensure peace and development for the subalterns; rather they increase the chaos rapidly. The laws of the state are supposed to help and protect the common people. Ironically, the State and Laws victimize the subalterns. Instead of providing protection and nurturing, the State pushes them into a risky and uncertain life. In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry depicts all sorts of oppression and uncertainty for the lower castes but shows a balance for surviving in the cruel Indian society at the last section of the novel. He shows the suicide of Maneck in 1984 after discovering the circumstances that lead to the beggary of Ishvar and Omprakash. But he balances this despair with the practical assistance of Dina who continues to render Ishvar and Omprokash, despite her own poverty and helpless condition in her old age.

Rohinton Mistry displays the whole social structure of India where the lower caste people are deprived from getting the equal right to elevate their social and economic position. At the same time, he brings out the role of upper castes, deep rooted conceptualized ideology, imperial attitude and poverty to display the social struggle of

the unprivileged castes in Hindu society. Mistry shows that the caste discrimination is an efficient way of deceiving the subalterns from their basic needs and rights. The subalterns should have had proper food, health, comfort, security, education, hygiene and freedom. What they get easily is torture, humiliations and violence as they are made only suffering. When Ishvar and Om are incarcerated in the labour camp, Ishvar asks about the crime they have committed. "It's not a question of crime and punishment its problem solution," says the foreman. (p. 338). Thus, the novel is an authentic representation of the subalterns' struggle in India. I cannot imagine another piece of literature making such an impact on me. *A Fine Balance* is truly a work of genius. It should be read by every one and make its author a legend.



## Chapter-4

*The God of Small Things: The Miserable Plight of Untouchables in India*



Arundhati Roy



...lay folded on the floor. He was semi-conscious, but wasn't moving. His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheek bones were smashed, ... his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, ... Four of his ribs were splintered, ... His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, ... His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his knee caps were shattered. Still they brought out the handcuffs.

(from *The God of Small Things* to show Untouchable's punishment, p-310)

Most of the modern English writers of India have sprung from an elite background and belong to the upper middle class that does not experience the struggle of the subaltern class. Mulk Raj Anand and Kamala Markandeya who have dealt with the subalterns' struggle and transformed their experience into great works of literature are rare in the modern era. In the post-1960s, with the emergence of post-modernism, Indian writers have reflected their new vision and exposed humanitarian themes such as the struggle and oppression of the subaltern class, experiences of the marginalized and diasporic existence, Dalit subjectivity, caste discrimination and sufferings of the untouchables. These crucial themes have come under focus especially by such writers as Bharati Mukherjee, Upamanya Chatterji, Anita Desai, Pankaj Jha, Shashi Deshpande and so on. They expose their strong urge to explore those areas that had lain in the dark long, or not considered 'suitable' enough for discussion. A majority of Indian English novelists appearing over the past two/three decades have shown an open concern with these contemporary critical issues. Arundhati Roy is one of the foremost novelists of the tradition who shows an exceptional awareness of the social crises. She has authored several thought provoking works as 'Confronting Empire', 'The Algebra of Infinite Justice' (2001), 'War in Peace', and so on. She always talks for humanity and downtrodden people of the society. In each of her writings, either book or essay, she regards social problems and tries to create social awareness. Her books like *The Threat of Nuclear Weapons*, *The Promotion of Equal Rights*, *The War on Terrorism* and *The Cost of Living*, and so on. In her recent book, *Power Politics* (2001) she has dealt with

contemporary social issues and raised her voice against the injustice coming from upper castes, government and powerful political agencies. Mrs. Roy is inspired by so many great writers as, Mulk Raj Anand, Yashpal, Nagarjun, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and to some extent, both Khushwant Singh and Kamala Das.

Arundhati Roy's debut Novel, *The God of Small Things*, for which she won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997, is a brilliant representation of the pain and suffering of the mute and the oppressed, the discarded and the downtrodden. She reflects all her concerns and awareness as well as anxiety for those who have been marginalized by the age-old oppressive systems of society. The author highlights the rigid caste-system that sanctions oppression, brutality, humiliation and inhumanity for the subaltern and untouchable class of the Indian society. Arundhati Roy has been intensely pre-occupied with the caste-discrimination policy of the Indian society, particularly the brutal denial of the basic human rights and dignity. Though India has got a tremendous development in case of science, technology and education by the recent years, its caste system has remained as rigid as ever. In an interview with Emily Guntheinz, Mrs. Roy mentions that the caste system is the "defining consideration in all India politics, in all India marriage .... The lines are blurring. India exists in several centuries simultaneously..... Its very strange situation where there's a sort of a gap between.... Sometimes it's urban and rural, but it's really a time warp".

The novel focuses on several small things: caste discrimination, practice of untouchability, forbidden love affair, duty of Indian police department, politics, death, divorce, patriarchal domination and so on aspects of contemporary India. Roy depicts one of the central characters called Ammu, the helpless daughter of the Ayemenem House, with her twin children Estha and Rahel and focuses all these issues skillfully. As Joydipsingh K. Dodya says, "The family is a microcosm of a large culture. It is the foundation unit in any society that upholds its beliefs, customs and tradition". Roy is very

landid, frank and often brutal in exposing the seamy side of Indian customs. The novel exposes most of the hidden aspects of social brutality. As one critic observes,

The novel is rich with Indian family relationships, social customs and mores, politics and the most universal human emotions and behaviour. At one and the same time, it is a suspenseful and tragic mystery, a love story, and an exposition of the paradoxes that exist in an ancient land whose history was forever altered by its British colonizers. (Shulin Nishant)

*The God of Small Things* represents Indian culture, caste system and suffering of untouchables. In this chapter, '*The God of Small Things: Miserable Plight of Untouchables in India*', I intend to re-examine the influence of the caste system and the miserable plight of untouchables in postcolonial India.

Among the characters in the novel, Velutha is an untouchable. Moreover, the narration of Velutha reveals the intermingling relationship between caste and the social prejudices in India. The name, Velutha means "white in Malayalam—because he was so black" (pg-73). The novel indicates that the low-caste people or the so-called Untouchables are denied the basic human rights in many ways. Untouchables are not allowed to enter the houses of higher caste. In earlier times, untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads, to cover their upper bodies and to carry umbrellas. Even more ironically, they have to put their hands over their mouths when speaking so that they can divert their polluted breath away from those whom they address. Mrs. Roy exposes the humiliation of the untouchables as,

Valutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House... Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchaboles Touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians.... Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Sarian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads. Not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They

had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (pg- 74).

Ironically, Valutha is more fortunate than other Untouchables because he is a s carpenter and he can fix many things. Therefore, Mammachi pays Velutha “less than would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a paravan” (Roy 77).

Untouchability becomes a stigma in India as racism was in America and apart in South Africa. Some people even convert to Christianity and join the Anglican C to escape the identity of Untouchability. In the novel, Roy shows that the forefath Velutha have embraced Christianity to escape the inhuman humiliations. Bu Christians themselves have adopted the strict and unavoidable caste system. Thu paravans have only received the status of “Untouchable Christians” with separate c and priest. Not only this, the untouchables are not still entitled to any govern benefits like job reservations of bank loans at low interest rates (Roy 74). Hence couldn't enjoy the benefits like other Touchables. Officially, they are Christian therefore casteless. It is like “not being allowed to leave footprints at all” (Roy 7 this way, caste is a source of inequality and disparity. They never get the right pla contrast, their “displaced” positions increase their mental agony to a great extent. D his untouchability and poor background, Velutha is a great help for Ammu's fami first Mammachi notices that little Velutha possesses a “remarkable facility wi hands” (Roy 74). Apart from the carpentry skills, Velutha has a greater knowled machines. In Mammaci's words, if Velutha hasn't been a Paravan, he might have be an engineer. Unlike the scholarly Oxford-training Chacko, Valutha maintains th canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer. It is also Valutha who oils the pump and the small diesel generator, and so on. Increasingly, the whole fam Mammachi depends more or less on Velutha. Yet it causes a great deal of reser among the other Touchable factory workers when Mammachi rehires Velutha factory carpenter and puts him in charge of general maintenance. In this ca untouchables become victim of others jealousy.



Untouchables are inborn sufferers. There is no way out of the stigmatized untouchability. They lead inhuman life deprived of all sorts of human rights. Velutha's mother died of tuberculosis and brother, Kuttappen is paralyzed. Therefore, he has to be independent to support the family. He lives in a society where its value is based on caste, social hierarchy and political ideology. When his affair with Ammu is discovered, it seems that everyone is waiting for his death. At the end, he learns the bitterest lesson, the price of his own life. And it proves that any attempt to challenge the supremacy of the authorities will be a failure. Due to his oppressed position in society, Velutha turns to Ammu for love and comfort, and his oppression is somewhat released by the intercourse with Ammu. He is no less oppressed than any other untouchable. This proves that caste status cannot be altered easily. Velutha's poverty exposes the miseries of the whole untouchable class. The author shows his family picture by saying,

... was Kuttappen, Velutha's older brother. He was paralysed from his chest downwards.... He missed his mother, Chella, who had died in the same corner of the room that he lay in now. She had died a coughing, spitting, aching, phlegmy death.... After Chella died, he was moved into her corner, the corner that Kuttappen imagined was the corner of his home that death had reserved to administer her deathly affairs. One corner for cooking, one for clothes, one for bedding rolls, one for dying in.(pg- 206).

In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy exposes the strong caste system prevalent in India in which the Paravans (the untouchables) are discriminated. The development and significance of the novel depend on the untouchable Velutha's sufferings and untold miseries at the hands of people whose attitudes are guided by age-old prejudices. Velutha stands betrayed by society, by his party and by the nation. Velutha's subjugation is multiple for being born as a paravan and for being the son of a paravan. Velutha is bitterly humiliated by Mammachi when his affair with Ammu is exposed:

‘Out!’ she had screamed, eventually. ‘If I find you on my property tomorrow I’ll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are! I will have you killed!’ .... Mammachi spat into Velutha’s face. Thick spit. It splattered across his skin. His mouth and eyes. (pg- 284)

Untouchables are always ruled by the upper caste. They are made victims through false accusations. In India, there is no ground of truth, justice and legal laws for such a class. Velutha’s death proves it clearly. After the outburst of Velutha’s crime, Kochamma reports to the police that an untouchable has forced himself upon her daughter Ammu. Baby Kochamma supplies all information to him to build a case large and concrete enough to capture the helpless paravan, adding a sufficiently heavy dose of emotion. She says,

“Educated by her family.... In the untouchable’s school, started by her father..... He was trained to be a carpenter by her family. The house he lived in was given to his grandfather by her family. He owed everything to her family.” (p- 261).

And thus, Velutha is accused falsely. Actually caste discrimination and practices of untouchability are based on false religious dogmas and prejudices. Where there is no ground of truth, justice and legal laws, how can we expect true statement from an untouchable caste petitioner?

The untouchables in India never get legal justice from the law department, as well as political parties. Mrs. Roy shows that both the communist party and the Congress have strong influence on the untouchables’ lives. They possess the authoritative power in the society and misuse it for their own purpose, basically to oppress the lower caste untouchables. Ironically, Roy intends to highlight the misuse of power in the novel. Inspector Thomas Mathew is described as the one who knows “whom he could protect and whom he couldn’t. She deliberately gives capitalized words to ridicule the Police.

“Police  
Obedience  
Loyalty  
Intelligence  
Courtesy  
Efficiency” (8)

Besides, the Inspector seems very proud of his rank and status as he says with Ba  
Kochamma, "He had a Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters – whole touchable  
generations waiting in their Touchable wombs..." (Roy 259). However, Velutha does not  
get any protection from the communist party when he is charged of raping Ammu. The  
police do not even get the whole truth before they decide to give Velutha a death penalty.  
Just the fact, Velutha is an Untouchable, becomes a sufficient reason. At the end, Velutha  
is betrayed not only by the big authority but also by his caste destiny.

It is not Velutha's fault that "he lived in a society where a man's death could be  
more profitable than his life had ever been." Eventually, he is betrayed by the law and the  
social customs of whole India. In India the untouchables are totally powerless in case of  
their own protection and in case of helping other helpless untouchables. They belong to  
no strong community which can support them in danger. They dwell in a world where  
privilege or support is not available. They have no right to raise their position by marrying  
an upper caste. The untouchables are restricted not to marry higher than their caste.  
Velutha breaks the law and has to sacrifice his life. After his love affair with Ammu  
discovered by the local police authority, he is tortured with great violence. The police  
assert that "they were not arresting a man, they were exercising fear" (Roy 309). The  
brutality of the policemen is described as follows:

...the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy.  
Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria. They didn't tear out  
his hair or burn him alive. They didn't hack off his genitals and stuff them  
in his mouth. They didn't rape him. They were merely inoculating a  
community against an outbreak. (Roy 309).

Arundhati Roy portrays India as a world of double standards, where principles  
and ideals are used as a mask to cover the worst kind of social injustice and cruelty, and  
barbaric behaviour is used as a tool to perpetuate the age-old exploitative caste system.  
As N.V. Reveendran says in his essay 'A Horn on the Forehead', "She (Arundhati Roy)  
is full of contempt for the envious old wretches; she dislikes the fraudulent politicians.  
But she is full of sympathy for the exploited by the rich and cheated by the traitor  
unionists. She is like many of those who are full of feeling for the sufferers but know

the way out.”(p. 107). Particularly the most brutal force on Velutha is shown when he is finally trapped and nabbed. The brutal torture and miserable death of Velutha, is really inhuman. The brutality as Roy shows,

Velutha appeared on the scummy, slippery floor. A mangled genie invoked by a modern lamp. He was naked, his soiled mundu had come undone. Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head look liked a pumpkin, (pp. 319-320).

In remote areas of India, till today, sentences or death panalty of lower castes people are decided by upper caste authorities without proper judgment.

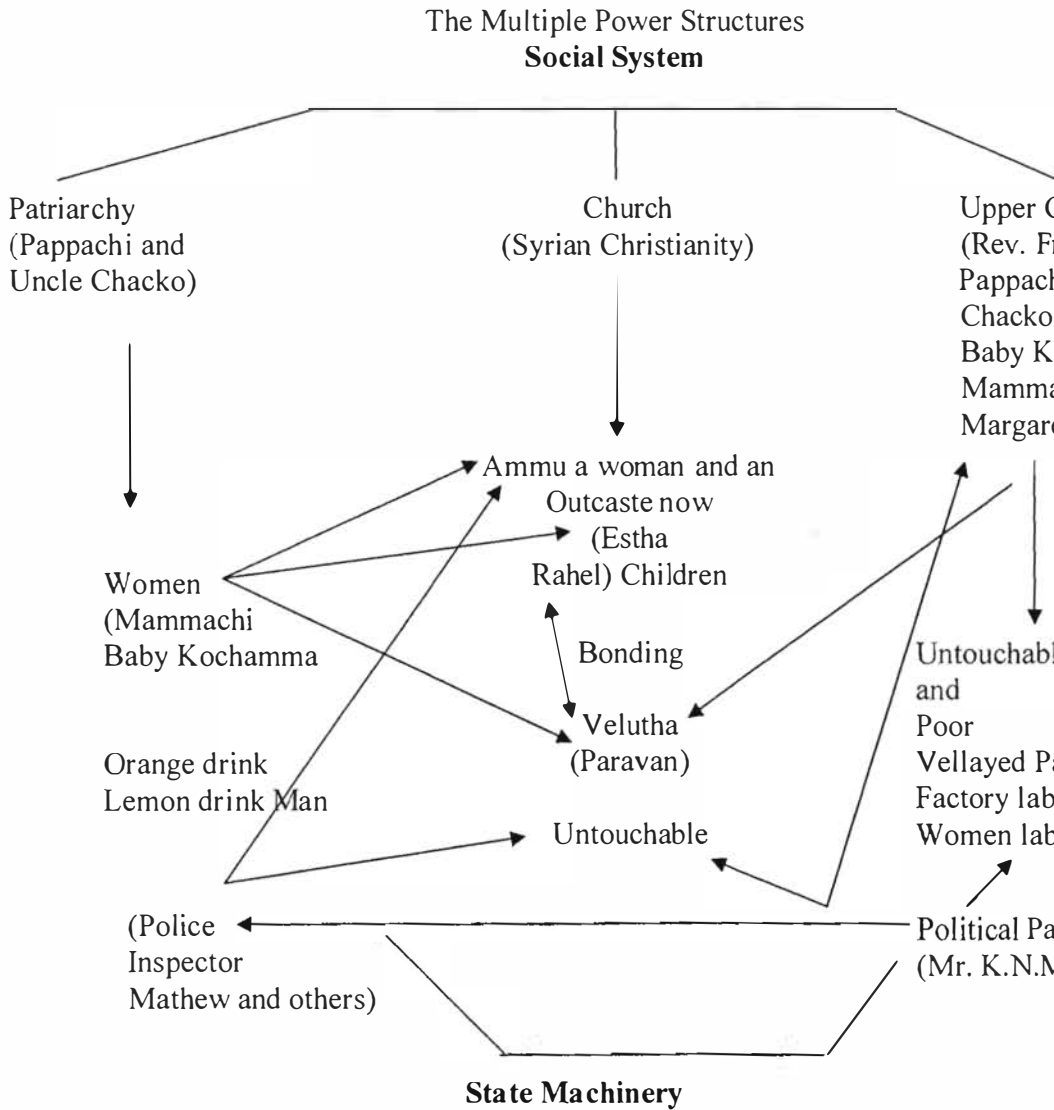
Velutha, “the Untouchable” is killed by the “touchable Boots”, of the state police. Ammu is banished and died alone, only thirty one. “...a very viable diable age” (161). Roy represents the true picture of untouchables in India bravely through Velutha. He is accused of kidnapping the twins, and Estha falsely confirms it. Estha becomes a silent creature whose incomprehensible “Yes” serves to prove an innocent man guilty. Roy expresses her disillusionment with the social conditions of the postcolonial world in which the untouchables still face a hostile society that does not let them live as free and independent individuals. Velutha, the god of small things, the outcaste can never co-exist peacefully with the “touchables” communities for as long as the stigma of untouchability is attached to him.

The question can be raised, “Why Roy brings law breaking issue in her novel? The characters of Ammu and Velutha, One from upper and one from lower caste, have consciously been chosen to break social laws and deny untouchability. She suggests that there is a “deliberate validation of erotic desire as an act of transgression.” It can be said that the transgression between Ammu and Velutha is out of their free will and also out of desire and bodily need. Yet the emphasis here is that transgression is one way of producing new power or strength. Since the love laws and caste taboos can not be altered, they choose their own ways to rebel or to protest against the supreme power and authority. Overall, the whole Indian society is hateful for its cultural codes which pigeonhole and limit people in various ways. Thus, through Velutha, the author reveals



some significant issues concerning caste, class, social mobilization, authoritative p  
of male dominant Indian society. As a microcosm of India, The Ayemenem's p  
structure, with the position of untouchable Velutha is shown below:

(Chart-3)



**Chart-3:** (From Reena Kothars article 'The multiple Power Stricture in Ayemenem')

The caste taboo and untouchability create horror feelings for all lower castes and casteless people. Breaking any social law means to make life hell for any untouchable or lower caste Hindu. After breaking the love law, Ammu becomes so fearful that she is haunted by a terrible dream. The dream indicates that Ammu and Velutha will break the caste taboo and be punished by their transgression. Ammu breaks the caste taboo by having an affair with untouchable Velutha and they taste the bitter fruit of breaking love laws. The origin of "Love Laws" is not exactly clear that Roy has highlighted in the novel, yet it indicates that India is a society with intricate cultural constraints and limits. How can we say that the Untouchables have no desire or no privilege to enjoy sexual intercourse?

It is not just Kerala but the whole of India that suffers from the caste prejudice. Transcending even a small frame, the people have to consider the social laws that allow and sanctions inhuman debasement and the cruel caste-based structure. Nila Shah remarks, "Velutha, the skilled paravan embodies the state of untouchable in free India. His plight is not much different from that of Anand's Bakha. In spite of his inborn noble qualities and physique he is not yet empowered to strike back. Though the days of crawling 'backwards with a broom' sweeping away the foot prints have become a tale of the past. The paravan's fate has not yet witnessed the change. Velutha, a god of small things lets no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water."

Decreeing human beings as "untouchable", "impure", "dirty", and so on is nothing but men's revenge on the gentle God. Who is 'god' of small things? Though there is a controversy, it is understood that the untouchable Velutha is the god of small things. As Ramesh k. Shrivastav says,

Undoubtedly, Velutha, the Paravan, is the God of small things. For most people Velutha is a small insignificant creature, an untouchable who fights no heroic wars, undertakes no Herculean tasks. Even his fearless acts of social defiance cannot remotely be compared to the stunningly heroic feats of Prithviraj who rescued his beloved Samyukta from the well-fortified castle-walls of her father. No paeans have been sung in his honour. He is a small paravan whose activities are too trivial to be given heroic dimensions. His importance lies in being what H.Mani Metei calls ‘the post-Darwinian Freudian God of primitive instinct, the secret charmer, Adam, Ammu’s Paramour’, who gives her the warmth of his love which the equally adventurous Ammu so much yearns for and reciprocate...

Ammu considers Velutha as the god of small things. Arundhati Roy’s aim is to transform the humble man and woman into heroic creatures who challenge the hypocritical yet zealous guardians of social taboos and codes, and sacrifice their lives at the end. Arundhati Roy says about Velutha,

“The God of Loss

The God of small things

He left no foot-prints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors.”

(P 265)

However, the untouchable protagonist Velutha raises his position not in Indian caste based society but among some critics’ and scholars’ mind through his silent resistance and acceptance of unjust death. According to the author Velutha is the god of small things, in fact the “inversion of God.”

Indian history never exposes its failure. It never says about the true struggle of the subaltern class. Through chapter 18, entitled, ‘The History House’, Ms. Roy wants to present history as a property of the upper castes. As the history is written by the oppressors, Velutha is cornered and finally killed by the heavy-footed sentinels of history. Joseph Conrad’s phrase, *The Heart of Darkness*, is used symbolically by Ms. Roy for calling the inner areas of the forest-covered Ayemenem. It becomes ironically Velutha’s hiding place from the “Posse of Touchable Policemen crossing the Meenachal

River”. The author plays the expression ‘Heart of Darkness’ to turn it into ‘Dark of Hearts’. She says,

The Kottayam Police. A cartoonplatoon. New-Age princes in funny pointed helmets. Cardboard lined with cotton. Hairoil stained. Their shabby khaki crowns. Dark of Heart. Deadlypurposed. (304)

The policeman’s slow, rhythmical movement is seen by the author as the march of history’s terror into the realms of the untouchables that destroys his dreams of equality and social justice. According to her, “Dark of Heartness tiptoed into the Head of Darkness”.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy shows the inhumanity, cruelty and brutality of caste discrimination in India. Roy presents the miserable plight and struggle of untouchables through the character, Velutha. She is very resentful of the increasing marginalization in India. In the name of social and religious codes, most of the elite deprive the subaltern group. Mrs. Roy has written the novel to break the caste taboo and to show how the lower castes should protest the oppression of upper caste Hindus. The novel attains greater compactness and praise for the exact portrayal of the oppressed class in India.

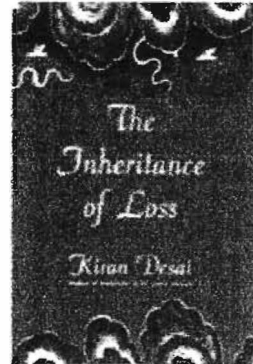


## Chapter-5

### *The Inheritance of Loss: A Subaltern Perspective*



Kiran Desai



*The Inheritance of Loss*

In the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* the term ‘subaltern’ is perfectly used to denote marginalized and oppressed people, especially those struggling against hegemonic globalization. Kiran Desai’s tragicomic novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* spans two continents and three generations. The story is set mainly in New York and India, contrasting the menial jobs and meager conditions of immigrant life in the city with the political unrest engulfing an isolated Himalayan hill town. Although the novel focuses on the fate of some powerless individuals, the author manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, some important contemporary international issues: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and postcolonial terrorist violence. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai focuses on the struggle and inhuman lifestyle of the subaltern redundant. Desai’s literary inheritances of India are some greats like R.K Narayan, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and her own mother, Anita Desai. They have also portrayed the subaltern struggle in their works but Biju’s struggle is something Desai came to know very intimately while living in the USA.

Desai’s novel is really more than just about some intense characters, emotions or a lovable narration but about some issues that are responsible for the suffering of the global subaltern. Biju’s story as an illegal immigrant in the USA is full of bitterness and hopelessness. Likewise, by the characters - the Nepalese tutor, Gyan and the Cook, Desai deftly shuttles between first and third worlds, illuminates the pain of exile and shows the ambiguities of post colonialism. By these characters Desai certainly wants to explore the pain of the subalterns and the unfairness of the Indian class discrimination.

Some of the major characters of *The Inheritance of Loss*, Biju, Gyan, and the Cook are the bitter portrayal of subaltern. Biju belongs to the 'shadow classes of illegal immigrants' in New York and spends much of his time dodging the authorities, moving from one ill-paid job to another. In a parallel narrative, Gyan is a descendant of a Nepali Gurkha mercenary falls in a group of ethnic Nepalese insurgents and struggles in India. Likewise, as a subaltern figure, the Cook works like an animal and feels barely human at all. What bind these seemingly disparate characters are a shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation. Referring to centuries of subjection by the economic and cultural power of the West, Desai writes, "Certain moves made long ago had produced all of them". But the beginnings of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century global economy serve merely to scratch those wounds rather than heal them. All these characters struggle with their cultural identity and the force of poverty.

Biju as an illegal immigrant tries to find work and a better life in New York. Biju works in a series of dead-end jobs epitomizes the plight of the illegal immigrant who has no future in his own country and who endures deplorable conditions working illegally in the USA. He changes his job so often like a fugitive on the run because he has no papers. In the very first year of America, he has worked at 'Don Pollo', 'The Hot Tomato' and 'Ali Baba's Fried Chicken' as a full time waiter. He has to spend the whole day standing either in kitchen or at the counter with a row of men. For being illegal immigrant he has to work hard but he is not well paid. To hide self and earn better he rolls from job to job, from 'Baby Bistro' to 'Le colonial' but misfortune always ran after him. He has nothing to do or nothing to say, as he is a subaltern figure. Gayatri Spivak in his essay '**Can the subaltern Speak**' truly says "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no story and cannot speak".

Biju has started his second year in America at 'Pinocchio's Italian Restaurant' where he has got humiliation along with low payment, ill treatment and hard slavery. As a poor uncultured Indian, Biju is humiliated so often by the staff and the owner's wife,

... said the owner's wife, "I think I'm allergic to his hair oil." (Chapter-10, pg-100)

Biju is trapped in America for green card. He now reaches in New York and makes a living at 'The Queen of Tarts Bakery'. Some days later he starts to find his fortune in 'The Restaurant'. He is humiliated even for being vegetarian and worshipping the Hindu deity. The Americans can not tolerate the oppression as they attack on his religion. Odessia, one of the employees of the restaurant says, "You know, Biju, isn't it ironic, nobody eats beef in America. But here these were Indians eating beef" (Chapter -22, pg-135.). Illegal immigrants' life is full of humiliation, pain and frustration. Not only Biju but his friend Saeed also leads an inhuman life for legal papers. He also shifts his job frequently. When he left his job in 'Banana Republic' he says, "My boss, I swear he was kicking my ass. Any way," he continued, "I got married." (Chapter -19, pg-110). To remove the subaltern identity, Saeed has to get married. Biju's hopes are also fading day by day just for the legal papers. The author depicts the illegal immigrants' life realistically in the novel. She says,

"Without the green card the green card, the.... without it he (Biju) could not leave.... For the men, of course, there were those who lived and died illegal in America and they had never saw their families, not for ten years, twenty, thirty, never again." (Chapter -17, pg-99.)

Biju's illegal life in New York is miserable. He tries to eke out an existence by working in a cafe, being caught in an alien culture which isn't too kindly to him. In the 'Gandhi Cafe' the lights are kept low and that is why Biju finds it better place to hide himself. But in the 'Gandhi Cafe', Biju's suffering reaches in the extreme level and he gets the perfect subaltern status. The owner gives the illegal immigrants' free housing not considering them human beings but as animals. The author says,

"At the Gandhi cafe, amid oversized pots and saw dusty sacks of masalas, Biju set up his new existence. The men washed their faces and rinsed their mouths over the kitchen sink, combed their hair in the postage stamp mirror tacked above, hung their trousers on a rope strung across the room along with the dish towels. At night they unrolled their bedding wherever there was room. (chapter-24, pg-147).



The environment of Gandhi Cafe is so unhealthy, so filthy that the rats have Biju's hair at night. After breaking his knee, he doesn't even get a doctor. The owner of the cafe, Harish Harry humiliates him as an illegal staff and advised him to go to his own country and return afterwards. Harry knows very well that it is not possible to go back again but he makes Biju trapped. The author says, "But it was so hard and there were so many here. It was terribly, terribly hard. Millions risked death, were persecuted, hated, lost their families- yet there were so many here" (chapter -30, pg-189). The illegal immigrants' mental pain is more acute than physical labor. All the immigrants become fearful whether they are being caught. The author says, "After two weeks Biju could walk with the aid of a stick. Two more weeks and the pain left him, but of course, the underlying green card problem that continued to make him ill". (chapter - 30, pg-190).

Biju, an illegal immigrant, bounces from low-paying job in the cruddy basements of Manhattan "learning to sear steaks" and direct paper mill cannons as dinners' to an easeless and ultimately has defeated in the life-battle to rise in to a better life. He wants to fulfill his father's dream. The cook had only one dream to see his son a gentleman. Very often he feels very proud of his son and boastfully says that one day Biju will take him and he will lead ever happy life. But fate always loves to play with poor people. At the end of the novel the author proves Biju as a perfect immigrant subject.

As a subaltern figure, Gyan also suffers in India as much as Biju in America. He is a typical subaltern in India. He has finished his bachelor's degree but has not yet been able to find a job. He is paid a very small amount of money for teaching Sai and has to walk by that. He has to walk in the cold for that small amount but the Judge always humiliates him. The author says, "His presence, he felt, was insolence, a liberty driven if not intend then certainly by foolishness.... You might be adept at mathematics, but

on sense appears to have eluded you” (chap-18, pg-109.). Having subaltern identity  
s family suffers in India from 1800s. His Nepali great grandfather had come India  
ea garden labor. Not only he but also his two sons sacrificed their lives as Indian  
r in Burma. Gyan’s only one uncle is alive who also has missed his toe for Indian  
They lead very poor life in India but nobody favors them for their subaltern  
y.

Gyan is an ambivalent Nepali tutor who sacrifices his young romance with Sai to  
ne violent separatists agitating for an independent state. Not surprisingly, half –  
ted, uprooted much Nepalese gravitate to the first available political cause in their  
a for a better life. Gyan also joins what sounds like ethnic nationalist movement  
y as an opportunity to vent his subaltern rage and frustration. After a brief crush  
Sai, Gyan finds himself rallying for the cause of fellow Nepali Indians who seek to  
their own country or at least their own state. The movement has stopped but Gyan  
nothing. He sacrifices his love and carries the same subaltern identity as a Nepali.

The cook is another Dalit character who leads his life as savage as a street dog.  
very ill paid and has to work day long without any rest. The author describes the  
as,

He was a powerless man, barely enough learning to read and write, had  
worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble, lived on  
only to see his son. (chap-2, pg-11).

only hope which keeps him alive bearing all humiliations and oppressions of the  
is to see his son prosperous and successful as a gentleman. He always re-reads his  
letter and feels proud of his son. The cook boasts to everyone he meets. He says,

son works in New York. He is the manager of a restaurant business in New York. Very big city. The cars and buildings are nothing like here. In that country, there is enough food for everyone..... One day, he thought, One day soon my son will take me.

(Chapter-14, Pg-84).

tolerates all sorts of torture of the Judge thinking that one day he might be free from the damned work and could spend his life happily with his son. But his dream never come true as he is a Dalit and the Dalits can never escape their miserable

not only does the Judge treat him badly but also the police who come to investigate the judge's complaint about the robbery, have treated him very scornfully. They have overturned his narrow bed and left his few belongings in a heap. They have also read all the letters which Biju has sent and began to read with out asking the cook. The police always treat the lower castes people and Dalits very badly. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy shows the inhuman treatment of the police towards the Dalits and this is evident through the Character of Velutha. The detail is described in the previous

The cook is very ill paid though he does all house hold work along with glossary, mopping, mallet, washing, cooking and so on. He is paid twenty-five rupees par month. His salary has hardly been changed in years. When he has begged, "But sahib, how can I live on this salary, the judge growled and said that all his expenses are paid for housing, clothing, medicines and that rupees are just extra. He also adds that Biju must help him in his studies. The cook always feels inferior for being in the service of a family. He feels that nothing as awful as being a cook that let him down and makes him a fool.

He always dreams his son a gentleman like the Judge and himself a proud father. Because of the oppression of the upper caste people, he always dreams to uplift his social

on through fascination as Bakha, the protagonist of Anand's *Untouchable* who also  
es the British people.

The real oppression, humiliation and suffering come in the life of the Cook when  
g, Mutt has been lost. The judge has beaten the cook and treated him as a beast. He  
nacked the cook over the head with his slipper. He begins to beat him harder and  
, and kick restlessly. When Sai comes to save him, he feels so bitter that he utters,

Let him. He wants to kill me. Let him kill me. What is my life? It's  
nothing. Better that it's gone. It's useless to everyone. It's useless to you  
and to me. Kill me! May be that will give you satisfaction. It will give me  
satisfaction. Go on! (chap-53:320)

In that old-age, after such humiliation, the cook has stopped dreaming  
nantly. Not only the cook but also all the subalterns, downtrodden or untouchables  
r their hopes with the course of the worst treatment of Indian society. The cook is  
representative of all lower class workers in Indian society who are deprived from their  
ights and needs.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, dealing with all levels of society and many different  
es, Desai shows life's humor and brutality, its whimsy and its passionate  
mitments that are both beautiful and wise. The novel seems to promise to take us  
where in this globalize confusion of identity, motive, routine, unrealized dreams and  
gible desires. Desai shows the ambiguities of post colonialism where one person's  
h means another's poverty. Orhan Pamuk supports her by saying, "people in the  
are scarcely aware of this over whelming feeling of humiliation that is experienced  
ost of the world's population," Desai basically wants to expose 'subaltern' as a  
l problem. She raises her voice as a representative of subaltern to prove that

can speak. She identifies late capitalism and postcolonial economic inequality responsible for the sufferings of subaltern. She argues to treat subaltern with empathy and remove the anxiety of transmission through her beautiful novel, *The Silence of Loss*.

## Conclusion:

“What is this disease? You may ask. This disease, brothers and sisters, is the notion of untouchability, ravaging us for centuries, denying dignity to our fellow human beings. This disease must be purged from our society, from our hearts, and from our minds. No one is untouchable, for we all children of the same God. Remember what Gandhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk.”

(Mistry's *A Fine Balance*; Pg-127)

Caste discrimination and untouchability have become a despicable practice in India. Over the years books have been written, committees and commissions have been formed, and laws have been enacted to eradicate the caste taboo and the stigma of untouchability. But, even after six decades of Independence, India continues the inhuman caste discrimination. It is true that the caste system, in its original form, is not hereditary but based on psychological foundations and the divisions of the society according to different occupational groups. Some scholars argue that the caste or class discrimination is not just inhumane but all writings on caste-inequality fail to create any significant change until the movement against the system emerged from the oppressors themselves.

Caste inequality generated by the caste system is a recurring theme in Indian literature and almost all major writers have responded seriously. Though not all, some writers have accepted their responsibility for the free-caste society. In 1920, Gandhi has emphasized that

removal of untouchability must be considered a major program of the Congress and Ambedkar (1891-1956), the greatest leader and spokesman of the Harijians, published the Marathi fortnightly Muk Nayak (1920) as a protest against the practice of untouchability. Some other writers have played a significant role in combating the prejudices and the tradition-bound perceptions. Through all the writers such as Unnava Shminarayana (*Malapalli-The village of the untouchable*), Sivaram Karanth (*Manana Dudi-the Durm of Chomai*); Tarasahankar Bandyopadhyay (*Kabi-The Kabi*); Thakazhi (*Tottiyute Makan – Scavenger's Son*); Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable*), Mahachand (*Sevasadan* and *Karmabhumi*), Indian literature discovers a new humanity in the life of the low and the lowest, the deprived and the humiliated people. As a great step that from the 1990s, a new area of publication has been established, called Dalit literature.

Through my research on Subaltern presentation of some selected Indian novels, I have exposed how Mulk Raj Anand, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai have portrayed successfully the tragedy of the subaltern class of India. It is the inhuman and stubborn social order that helps these writers to create such pathetic characters as Mahachand, Ishvar, Omprakash, Velutha, Biju, the Cook and Gyan. Ironically the “lowest beings” of mankind in Western literature can at least rebel, but these subaltern characters do not do so. More or less, all these writers have intentionally presented the sufferings and tragedy of the characters to show the structure of Hinduism as well as the dehumanizing caste discrimination of India. I strongly believe that the characters from the lower and outcastes, i.e. sweeper, coolie, chamaar, paravan and manual scavenger are universal metaphors of the sociology, history and metaphysics of human suffering and of the human inhumanity to fellow man. I therefore, argue that Anand, Mistry, Roy and Desai create humanism to a great extent through their writings with the true representation of subaltern-struggle in Indian society.

Through the portrayal of the subaltern characters in these novels, the authors have successfully shown that the caste system and untouchability of Brahminical Hinduism are responsible in a great extent for inequality and therefore, poverty in India. Many Dalits continue to live in extremely miserable conditions. Nevertheless, the protest/struggle of subalterns does not necessarily succeed. Rather, Subalterns are likely to be assimilated by dominant groups. In other words, the center domesticates the other by the way of assimilation. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts, “intellectuals must attempt to expose and know the discourse of society’s Other” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”) Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha insists that “the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that hunt the historical present.” Indeed, there are enough good reasons to believe that those elites can do something for the subalterns. Along with writers, social workers, politicians, governments and so on, everybody should take part to break the oppressive and inhuman caste system. Increased access to education and leadership of Dr. Ambedkar are major steps in the formation of social movements and progress towards emancipation. Along with those steps, *Untouchable*, *A Fine Balance*, *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* have brought international attention to the subaltern class. Thus, by reading these books, we should feel an urge to break the caste system and remove the practice of untouchability not only from India but also from everywhere of the world.

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