

# Theme of Resistance in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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## Abstract

*This research attempts to focus on the growing acts of resistance from the part of subalterns in A Fine Balance. Here, by criticizing the atrocities and perpetration of so-called upper class people and authorities over subalterns and showing the subaltern resistance, the writers try to show the growing subaltern consciousness in India. The marginalized characters undergo trial and tribulation in the novel. In the novel, Avinash is brutally murdered, Maneck commits suicide, Ishvar and Om are forced to undergo sterilization which leaves them deformed and destitute. Similarly, Dina loses her much needed independence and self respect and the society presented by Mistry is not an idealized one. Superstition, violence and gender inequalities are rampant. It is also the site of the repetition of caste-based brutality. The lower castes are beaten, tortured and killed for trivial reasons. By showing his characters in the position of resisting the brutalities and atrocities of upper class people and authorities, this research work argues that Mistry attempts to focus on the growing consciousness and resistance among subalterns in post-independent and Post Revolution Indian society, where subalterns want nothing but equality, justice, freedom, coexistence, and of course, communal harmony.*

**Keywords:** *Subaltern, Consciousness, Resistance, Untouchables*

The mentioned novel expresses the atrocities committed on the poor in India both by the upper castes and authorities. By showing the devastating effects of the caste system on the educational, social, and economic status of subalterns in Indian society, Mistry attempts to instill the sense of consciousness among subalterns and downtrodden people of India through their act of resistance. By doing so, the writer seeks to destabilize hegemonies based on caste, gender and class.

*A Fine Balance* is basically set in an unnamed Indian city at the outset in 1975 and later in 1984 when the country was declared as the State of Emergency under the Premiership of Indira Gandhi. The novel bears four characters from different backgrounds – Dina Dalal, Ishvar Darji, his nephew Omprakash Darji and the young student Maneck Kohlah. They come together and develop an attachment and a love. In the length and the breadth of the novel, he spotlights on Parsi world to deal with diversified aspects of human experiences and Indian life including its people, climate, cities, ethnicities, classes, regional identities and of course the concept of untouchability and its impacts, more particularly in the life of subalterns. In the novel, the writer shows how political changes bring so many ups and downs in the life of the poor.

The novel spotlights on the issue of untouchability and caste system in India. The novel opens with a chapter called Prologue 1975 and ends with Epilogue 1984 expressing socio-political upheaval of India. The novel begins with a train journey and conversation among common people about the recently grown political situation, more particularly of the State of Emergency. Common people like Ishvar and Om are going to Dina's house in search of job. In the due course of their journey, they happen to hear the discussion

among the general people in the train regarding the political situation in the country. As the narrative goes:  
'Maybe it has to do with the Emergency,' said someone. 'What emergency?' 'Prime Minister made a speech on the radio early this morning. Something about country being threatened from inside.' Sounds like one more government tamasha.' (Mistry, 5-6)

The indifferent attitude of the common people can be seen here. They do not think the activities of the government quite serious. The so-called government activities are nothing but melodrama for them. Since the lower class people have got nothing from the government they are not expecting anything new from the government. G. Spivak Chakravarty uses the term 'subaltern' to refer to lower class people. As she puts:

The word was under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monism', and was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern'. That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor (46).

Here, the writer may be hinting at the fact that the term "subaltern" denotes lower rank in social strata. Chakravarty proposes a theory of subalternity in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this essay, she vindicates the limitations of the subalterns, asking "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (283). By the term, 'subaltern,' she means the oppressed subjects or more generally those "of inferior rank" (283). She goes on to add that "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (287). Spivak concludes the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by reiterating her standpoint that "the subaltern cannot speak" (308). Maybe she wants to say that subalterns lack education and awareness, therefore, they cannot express their voice. At the start of the novel, we see the interactions among the lower class people.

Although Mistry makes a start giving a picture of turbulent Indian city, he continuously flashes back to the past. Ishvar is the uncle of Omprakash who is his brother's son. Ishvar and Om's father, Narayan change their profession and at the same time, they change their identity by altering their surname. Here, we, the readers, also see the curse of untouchability. Ishvar and Narayan's father, Dukhi, who comes from Chamaar caste, is threatened by the upper caste people because Dukhi is the father of two sons. They spread the rumor that Dukhi has abducted a Brahmin's son. So, the upper caste people have the right to take the boys in their custody. This again shows repression for being untouchable. As the narrative moves:

'What is happening to the world?' They complained. 'Why two sons in an untouchable's house, and not even one in ours?' What could a Chamaar pass on to his sons that the gods should reward him thus? Something was wrong; the Law of Manu had been subverted. Someone in the village had definitely committed an act to offend the deities, surely some special ceremonies were needed to appease the gods and fill these empty vessels with male fruit. (100)

The above-mentioned narrative clarifies the attitude of so-called upper-caste people to the poor and lower class people. They even think that the lower class people or untouchables in their opinion do not have the rights to have sons. What can be more painful than that? They are even not allowed to enter the temple. When they enter the temple, it is regarded as impure.

Due to this kind of notion of people Dukhi remembers the concept of Mahatma Gandhi regarding the classless society and that also touches his heart. Gandhi not only struggles for the independence of India in non-violent fashion, but also attempts to reform the society's hundred-year old notion of untouchability. Gandhi's concept of equality spreads to unite various cultural, regional, linguistic, religious people all over India. The bad effect of untouchability finds expression in a speech of an unknown leader who says:

'What this disease?' You may ask. This disease, brother 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 are all children of the same God. Remember what Ganhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk.' (107)

Even after the awareness for removing the untouchability, problem still prevails and untouchables keep on suffering. They do not get any benefits. Rather they are compelled to be isolated. For instance, Ishvar and Narayan are severely punished by the school teacher for entering the classroom and touching the reading materials. The untouchables do not get the opportunity to take the education. This indicates that illiteracy is used as a weapon to suppress the lower caste people: As the narrative further goes “‘You chammar 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. ‘Is this what your parents teach you? To defile the tools of learning and knowledge? Answer me! Is it?’” (110).

During this tensed and racial conflict for suppression, the Indian Subcontinent has been liberated from the British colonizers and divided into two different countries. But the countries are born on the basis of religions. So an unstable situation is created with the partition of India. India is created for the Hindu population and Pakistan for the Muslim population. For this reason lots of Hindus and Muslims are being displaced or evicted from one country to another. Sometimes they willingly go to their desired country. But many are forced to leave their native land. And the force takes the form of violence which leads to riots marked by mass killing, burning houses and gang rape. The horror of the riots is described in the lines of the novel:

[...] the stories kept multiplying: someone had been knifed in the bazaar in town; a sadhu hacked to death at the bus station; a settlement razed to the ground. The tension spread through the entire district. .. The killings started in the poorer section of town, and began to spread; the next day the bazaar was empty [...] bread is become rarer than gold. (124)

The quotation above shows as to how in the violence, subordinates are easily targeted. Due to the violence in the name of caste, creed and custom, there is a great scarcity of food. Food is rarer than gold. In fact, people from subordinate class have to suffer much.

In Ranajit Guha's succinct definition, “the word 'subaltern' is 'a name for the general attribute of subordination [...] whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way” (27). Explaining the aim of Subaltern Studies in Subaltern Studies I Guha says:

The aim of subaltern studies is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian Studies, and thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area. (48)

Guha's effort is to recover or represent the subaltern as a subject of history, from the jumble of documentary and historic discourse that deny the subaltern that power of agency. Guha differentiates politics from elite politics. He thinks that “it was an autonomous domain for it neither originated from elite politics, nor did its existence depend on the latter” (4). Guha further argues that even after the independent of the country, there is constant and continuous exploitation over the poor from the part of neocolonialists. Subaltern Studies emerged as a theory of change which sustained vigorous political commitment. The academic atmosphere was witnessing a great change at the time Post modernism and Post structuralism had a strong hold at the academic field. On the other hand, cultural studies were getting more and more attention from all sides.

Up to this, Mistry shows the condition of the untouchables in the colonial era as well as in the time of independence. But as the story progresses, we see that the problems and sufferings of the subalterns do not end; rather multiply. The nation cannot guarantee the protection of the right of the subalterns and the untouchables in the way the rights of elite are guaranteed. The domination over the subalterns remains the same even after Indian independence. The government passes the new laws but in reality the laws do not protect the lower class people; rather the laws go against them, allows the elite to harass them. For example, Narayan is killed and his whole family except Ishvar and Om is burnt alive by the gang of Thakur, the upper caste Brahmin and the village Chairman. They are tortured and killed because Narayan demands to have his own voting right. And the upper class is jealous of Narayan's prosperity. The elite class gets angry

with Dukhi for making his sons tailors instead of initiating them into the inherited profession of a cobbler. Before that, Narayan expresses his dissatisfaction with the unchanged condition of the lower class people's fate. This portrayal of the lower class people shows the social discrimination which was to be eliminated in postcolonial India but ironically it has not happened. As the narrative goes:

'What is it, what's bothering you?' 'I was just thinking that ... thinking how nothing changes. Years pass, and nothing changes.' Dukhi sighed again but not with pleasure. 'How can you say that? So much has changed. Your life, my life. Your occupation, from leather to cloth ... 'Those things, yes. But what about the more important things? Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper-caste bastards still treat us worse than animals.' (142)

The wrath of the subalterns can be clearly seen here. The inhuman treatment of upper-caste people towards the lower-class people is rampant in the society. It is a duty of the government to root out the existing social evils such as untouchability but has done nothing. The government keeps on passing new laws but not in favor of lower-class people. It is because the power is controlled by rich people or upper-caste people. Powerful people do not even hesitate to kill by out breaking the violence. In the riots, the family of Ishvar and Om dies.

After the whole family's death, Ishvar and Om go to the city. But they cannot change their life in the city. There, they seek for a shelter and a job. Even though they get a job in Dina's house as tailors, misfortunes continuously follow them. Their slum house is destroyed by the government and they live in pavements. They struggle a lot but cannot have the opportunity to change their fate because of the government policy. The reaction to the government activities can be seen in the voice of a Sikh taxi driver when Maneck takes a ride in that taxi:

'That's a very long time, sahib. That means you left before the Emergency ended – before the elections. Of course, for ordinary people, nothing has changed. Government still keeps breaking poor people's homes and jhopadpattis. In villages, they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are done.' (581)

Even the political killings are pointed out in the novel by Mistry referring to Avinash's death. The cause of the death is mysterious. Police say that he died in a railway accident. On the other hand, Avinash's parents claim that he was killed by Police brutalities. At this juncture, government and politics both fail to protect a student leader who shares anti-emergency opinion thus:

He tore his eyes from the photograph to read the rest of the article. The reporter had met the parents; he wrote ... they had, during the Emergency, lost their eldest under circumstances that were never satisfactorily explained. The police claimed it was a railway accident, but the parents spoke of wounds they had seen on their son's body at the morgue. According to the reporter, the injuries were consistent with other confirmed incidents of torture ....' (594)

At the end, it is discovered by Maneck that Ishvar and Om become the beggars. When Maneck expresses his surprise knowing that he is stopped to think or investigate by Dina. This transformation of Ishvar and Om is significant. With this, the destination of the subalterns is revealed. Although it cannot be said in strong voice, what has happened to Ishvar and Om that happens to every subaltern in this world but this is the outcome that most of the subalterns have to accept as their predetermined fate. The subalterns or peripheral group of people struggle hard for the changes in their life. Ironically, except few, all of them fall apart into disaster where their existence turns into miserable story:

'There is no wife, no children. They have become beggars.' 'Sorry – what, Aunty?' 'They are both beggars now.' 'That's impossible! Sounds crazy! I mean – aren't they ashamed to beg? Couldn't they do some other work, if there's no tailoring? I mean – 'Without knowing everything you want to judge them?' she cut him off. (606)

Mistry as a storyteller has cleverly lined history and fiction to bring out the socio-political events that

took place during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's State of Emergency, a period of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, oppression, violence and bloodshed. Emergency was a blow to the already limited capacities and options of having a better future for the common man. In the mentioned novel, he has depicted the Indian Socio-economic and political life as well as the Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs, beliefs and religion with complete authenticity and mastery. His characters develop gradually widening into the social, cultural and political world. His novels have a leisurely pace without ever losing the reader's interest and attention. The characters change and develop subtly and totally engross the reader.

The fate of the marginalized and the dispossessed who find themselves at the mercy of the Brahminical and pseudo-secular elites shaping India is explored through the traumatic experience of the chamaars-turned-tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash. Dukhi, the father of Ishvar and Narayan sends them to be apprenticed as tailors under his friend, Ashraf, a Muslim tailor. Dukhi's daring to divert his sons to a different job becomes the talk of the town and he in turn earns the wrath of the so called chaste Hindus "indeed was courageous, considering that the prime of his own life has been spent in obedient compliance with the traditions of caste system. Like his forefathers before him, he had accepted from childhood the occupation preordained for his present incarnation" (109). Through the healthy relationship between Dukhi and Ashraf and the unhealthy bondage between the subaltern chamaars represented by Dukhi and the high caste chaste Hindu, Thakur Dharamsi, Mistry drives home the fact that "ideal human relationship should be above all the concept of caste, creed and color." (19) When Narayan returned to the village to cast his vote, Thakur Dharamsi, the Zamindar felt infuriated. Thakur's men beat Narayan and his friends to death and in due course the entire family was burnt alive. The subalterns succumb to the arrogance of Thakur Dharamsi who strongly believed that crossing the line of caste was a serious offence and that such people should be stringently punished. Even police do not file an F.I.R calling Ishvar and Om, "filthy achool castes." (172)

The adverse effect of Emergency was experienced by Ishvar and Om who fell prey to almost all the aspects of Emergency and were reduced to beggary. During Emergency, in the name of beautification people were left, immobile and rootless. The slogan, "The Nation is on the move." (303) seemed quite ironical because instead of advancement and prosperity all the characters experienced destruction and identity crisis. The process of beautification introduced slum clearance and sterilization. People were forcefully evicted from the hamlets they lived in and moved to work camps where the living conditions were almost unbearable and deplorable.

Ishvar and Om were quite forcibly taken to one such work camp where they are forced to undergo sterilization. In the aftermath, Ishvar develops infection and one of his legs is amputated, making it impossible for him to practice tailoring and earn his livelihood. Om, who is a youth in his prime waiting to be married, is also sterilized under the orders of the village Zamindar, Thakur Dharamsi. The needless arrogance of the upper class to maintain social supremacy led to the consolidation and Emergence of the Dalit consciousness in the Indian politics. Despite the new laws regarding untouchability, exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes continue. Through Thakur Dharamsi, Mistry reveals the silenced histories and suppressed voices in centuries of violence and domination characterized by the Indian political and caste system. Mistry emphasizes the fact it is too difficult to fight against the deep-rooted caste system in India.

After the death of her husband, Rustom Dalal, Dina Dalal tried to live a descent and independent life through her tailoring business. She hired Ishvar and Om to work for her and also partially rented her apartment to Maneck Kohlah who stayed there as a paying guest. Because of Ishvar and Om's disability, Dina is forced to close her sewing business. Bankruptcy forced Dina to undergo the worst she feared, she lost her independence and was forced to live with her brother, Nusswan, who treated her like a maid. Many critics argue that the root cause of the plight and predicament of subalterns as mentioned in the novel is that they do not have history. And the history is controlled by powerful ones. In order to empower subalterns, consciousness should be instilled in them through rewriting history in their favor.

Gayatri Spivak Chakravarty's introduction to selected subaltern studies IV cites about subaltern

consciousness and "the colonial subject" as the basis of theorization perceive their as making "a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specifically a theory of change" (4). Postcolonial Cultural Criticism and literary theory has embraced subaltern studies endeavor in deconstructing historiography:

[...] Subaltern consciousness is subject to the elite that are never fully "recoverable that it is always asked from its recovered signifiers indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed that it is irreducibly discursive historical stage peculiar to the subaltern rather than the grounding positive view of consciousness. (SS IV: 339)

Here, the writer is trying to focus on the fact that history itself is under the grip of powerful people; therefore, there is consciousness only on elite people but not on subaltern. Dipesh Chakravarty in his seminal essay, "Invitation to a Dialogue" points out about subaltern consciousness as the "peasant consciousness" (72). In his essay "Invitation to a Dialogue" he writes:

The central aim of the subaltern studies is to understand the consciousness that informed and still informs political actions taken by the subaltern classes on their own, independently of any elite initiatives. It is only by giving this consciousness a central place in historical analysis that we see the subaltern as the maker of the history he or she lives out. (374)

Chakravarty further views about two opposing totalities — the elite and the subaltern, the feudal mode of power and the present communal mode of power. This twofold division, elites and subaltern, tends to undermine and supplement the Marxist method of class analysis, if it ignores class analysis and one-sidedly emphasizes subaltern action alone, subaltern studies is also supposed to be ill equipped to analyze the role and effect of colonialism. Then the class analysis should be the latest anti-imperialism within the communal consciousness. Spivak represents the voice of difference among the major post colonialist theorists. Spivak presents the situation of subaltern members whose spokesperson becomes their life giver and master:

The small peasants' proprietors cannot represent themselves they must be represented. Their representation must appear simultaneously as their master as an authority over them as an authority over them as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above.(71)

Spivak's attempt to speak on the behalf of subaltern class comes against the intellectual elites who can only present interpretation of the subaltern voice filtered through an intellectual elitist viewpoint. The actual subaltern is relegated to the position of subject rather than participants in a two way dialogue. Spivak provokes academician to understand how their positions of intellectuals and economic privilege limit their integrity while representing the subaltern. In her major essay, "Can Subaltern Speak?" Spivak clearly assess that subaltern cannot speak. The subaltern as a member of the non- ruling class has to face the bias of the elite intellectuals.

Spivak says, "There is every chance that the elite intellectuals overshadow the subaltern people whom he represents" (41). She draws the attention to the problem of representation; it is the privileged position of elite intellectual scholars that let them serve as the spokesperson of marginalized subaltern. This kind of representation does not stand in the socio-cultural reality rather it tends to give false impression about the represented subaltern class. The privileged elite manipulate in the representation of the subaltern group and this representation brings the elite writer to the lime light at the cost of the represented subaltern.

Dipesh Chakravarty sees Subaltern Studies as a postcolonial project of writing history. He says that his concentrations on the relationship between postcolonialism and historiography which overlook the contributions that the other disciplines –political science, legal studies, anthropology, literature, cultural studies and economics -- have made to the field of subaltern studies. In his essay "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography" he writes:

This essay is motivated by a question that has the discipline of history in focus: in what ways can one read the original historic graphic agenda of Subaltern Studies as not

simply yet another version of Marxist/radical history [...] on the discipline of history for two reasons: the relationship between the new field of postcolonial writing and historiography has not yet received the attention. (212)

The ideas and ideals of the above-mentioned critics show the need to rewrite history including all undercurrents. The contributions of subalterns are abundant in the history; however, that is simply not highlighted. It is because history is immensely guided by powerful ones who are supposed to be victorious and subalterns are simply regarded as vanquished. In the history of India, Caste System can be taken as one of the causes to make the lower-caste people isolated and alienated.

Caste System has been India's most grave societal evil since time immemorial. The caste discrimination and repression is mostly found to be in practice among the Hindus of India. Mistry has made his best attempt his best to voice the cruelty and oppression experienced by Dalits in his novel *A Fine Balance*. The novel exposes class and caste disparities of Indian society which also mirrors a visual rendering of those who endure its inequities. Rohinton Mistry depicts Dalits, who are born into a leather-making chamar family. The caste-Hindus have treated them brutally in a distressing manner. The inhumanity of upper castes is glaringly evidenced in the novel. One of the examples is as to how Dalits are treated cruelly is illustrated in the following lines in the narrative:

For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned, though not to death- the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambir was less fortunate; he had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress. Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord's field, had been forced to eat the landlord's excrement in the village square. (108-9)

Animalistic behavior towards Dalits is exhibited clearly in their activities such as stoning Sita just for walking in the streets of upper castes till her first blood, forcing Dayaram to feed the excrement of the landlord for asking wages and so on. Such inhuman actions by the upper castes have become a routine phenomenon. Caste System is a kind of disease that denigrates not only Hindu culture but it is also a blot on Indian society and it is reflected in the narrative:

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 are all children of the same GOD. Remember what Gandhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk. (359)

Caste System is regarded here as poison to society. We all are god's children but the evil system of caste has ravaged the people and society. There four characters, Dina, Maneck, Ishvar and Omprakash are ruthlessly exploited by the so-called members of upper caste. The lives of the tailors' forefathers who were in fact 'Chamars' or 'Mochis' mirror the ruthless cruelty of the caste-system in the rustic India where unbelievable oppressions are carried out on the lower castes by the upper-caste Jamindars and Thakurs. Tyrannical caste-violence has compelled Dukhi, a Mochi, and the grandfather of Omprakash and father of Ishvar from their traditional occupation of working with leather to learn the dexterities of tailoring in the town. They migrated to metropolis.

The tailors experience the emotional dislocation of following a new professional uniqueness, struggling to get a safe place in a new city and the physical displacement from their village to the city. Quite often they desire to go back to their village after earning some money. Ishwar's father was doing unclean work, and he wished to see a better life of his sons Ishvar and Narayan so he sent them to a nearby town to learn tailoring. He leaves his sons with his Muslim friend Ashraf in the town who takes them as apprentices in his tailoring business. Dukhi Mochi opines sarcastically that at least his Muslim friend treated him better than his Hindu brothers. Ishvar and Narayan saves Ashraf's shop by claiming that it belongs to them, when Hindu fundamentalists try to set it ablaze in a communal riot, leaving Ashraf forever in their debt. Narayan comes back to his village and starts a tailoring business for the people of his village, earns enough money to

construct his own house. Narayan's business flourishes till the local elections were declared by a landlord Thakur, who eventually burns down both the parents of Omprakash by tying together.

Atrocities of upper castes on the lower castes are unabated. Dalits are denied education. Ishvar and Narayan are beaten up for entering the village school. Then Dukhi approaches Pandit Lalluram, a Brahmin priest whom he trusts that he can do justice to him: even an untouchable could receive justice in his hands. Pandit Lalluram is bitterly satirized as an unmannered, greedy intransigent who is not concerned in doing justice for lower castes. Dukhi is frustrated at this attitude of the Lalluram:

Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper-caste bastards still treat us worse than animals... More than twenty years have passed since independence... I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like. (142)

Thus, Dukhi expresses his anguish about the injustice and oppression imposed on the Dalits who are not allowed to drink the water from the village well and forbidden to enter the temple. Even the women of village were exploited due to the caste system. For example, Dukhi's wife, Rupa was victimized and raped by the Zamindar's gardener for stealing fruits and milk from upper-caste houses in order to feed her children. Her disgraceful exploitation by the gardener is Mistry's ruthless observation on the dual standards existing in the contemporary Indian society in the form of caste system.

Dalits are subjected to inhuman treatments at the hands of the upper castes. Even in the local elections, the blank ballots were filled in by the landlord's men. Thus, the lower caste people were forbidden to vote freely and use their franchise in a democratic country like India. The family of Prakash's father and his two grandchildren are knifed to death. After knowing this brutal incident Ishwar and Om rush to police station to file an F.I.R. (First Information Report) But the Sub Inspector rudely comments "What kind of rascality is this? Trying to fill up the F.I.R. with lies? You filthy cahoots castes are always out to make troubles! Get out before we charge you with public mischief" (148). At every stage of their lives, Dalits encounter oppression. During emergency, chamars-turned-tailors pay a visit to their village in search of bride for Om; they are victimized by their old high-caste enemy, Thakur Dharmasi and are maltreated and crippled under the alleged reason of the 'free vasectomy programme' of the Government. One of the themes of subaltern literature is oppression besides exploitation of Dalits and it is poignantly depicted in the novel, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, who gives a heart-rending version of man's barbaric inhumanity to man and also the unimaginable deprivation and inequalities experienced by the downtrodden and oppressed in India.

Resistance literature portrays not only the position of an independent nation during the period of liberation but also it suggests the necessary steps to be taken by the revolutionaries. It focuses on the study of literature besides material world such as the obtaining of civil and human rights, the throwing of hegemony and active reconstruction of interrupted histories. It is born out of social injustice and political marginalization.

The writers from minority community often focus on social issues. They create a new world rather than representing the existing one. They give the voice to the people who do not have a place in the actual world and are striving to create an identity (such as, homosexual, women and black). The author with an intention to reach the audience focuses on the emotions, frustrations and triumphs of the people. Once a literature becomes expressive of identity, it becomes majoritarian. For example Aboriginal literature is minoritarian as long as it is creating an identity. In the task of creating new identity, new tradition has been created. A new voice gives expression to the old stories. Each generation and community uses tradition of art differently and re-reads it by its own yardstick. Parsi writers wanted to create their own space within dominant Indian cultural space. They are putting all their efforts to create an identity to their community. Rohinton Mistry's discourse challenges and resists the tantalization of the dominant culture within India. He strives for identity of Parsi community in his novel. His works brilliantly captures the crowded, throbbing life of India as they are closely linked with social and political background

It was set in India during the period of state of emergency, which was a turning point in Indian



politics. The novel highlights the crisis of the nation and the lived experience of its characters. When the martial law was enforced, civil rights evoked and the masses, particularly the working classes and the rural poor were terrorized by state repression. Women and men alike were dragged off to temporary clinics for forced sterilization. Strikes and demonstrations were banned, and hundreds of trade unionists, activists and radicals were jailed.

*A Fine Balance* is a realistic novel told almost entirely from the point of view of subaltern characters that were thrown together by the force of circumstances and necessity. The novel traces their struggle to survive and the eventual destruction of his community by larger social forces. Two of the four characters are tailors. Om Prakash and Ishvar Darji are Dalits of the Chammar (tanner) caste who have fled from the caste oppression of their village. Dina Dalal, is their employer, who struggles to preserve her fragile independence, hoping to climb into the ranks of the middle class. Maneck Kohlah, a student, comes from a well-to-do family but shares the alienation of the other characters in the novel. He seems to stand in for the classic rural/urban dichotomy.

We can see the resistance between the characters and their immediate physical environment. Even in sufferings they express their resistance by meekly accepting the pains. This point is brought into limelight in the novel through the character Dukhi, who worked all his life with dead animals. He said that, "his own skin became impregnated with the odour that was part of his father's smell. The leather-workers stink that would not depart even after he had washed and scrubbed in the all cleansing river [...] he wondered if flaying would get rid of it or did it go deeper than skin (130)?"

We can find resistance in almost all the characters of the novel. Roopa wife of Dukhi is a woman character in this novel, whose midnight forays to steal milk from the homes of landlords and fruits from the orchard to feed her two children Ishvar and Narayan offer us a glimmer of the kind of courage, that the daily ordeal of survival required in caste dominated villages. But she had to pay for her actions by becoming prostitute herself to the man guarding the orchard grove. Similarly, Dukhi defies prevailing caste restrictions by sending his sons off to the city to become tailors and he gets succeeded in making his dream comes true. Dukhi's younger son Narayan decided to settle in his native land. He had a happy life till he was submissive to his landlords. But the moment he raised his voice against the injustice prevailed in the society he was toppled. For instance, at the time of election, Narayan insisted on registering his vote, against the interest of the local leader, Thakur Dharamsi, whose rigging of the ballot goes unquestioned by anyone in the society. Narayan was paid for his retaliation against the Thakur, as he was tortured and murdered by Thakur's men and his corpse was exhibited on the square of the village, as Thakur wanted to teach the lesson to the low class people of the village to be submissive to him forever.

When Om Prakash wanted to take revenge on Thakur Dharamsi for killing his father Narayan, he was sterilized and forced to go under vasectomy. Ishvar and Om Prakash who reached the city for having bright future were turned into crippled beggars. They neither have place in their homeland nor in the adopted city. Eventually, they expressed their resistance by mocking and laughing at the society. The element of subaltern activity of political agency is constantly kept at bay. Avinash, a leader of student union, who raised his voice against the Government policies, was silenced.

Free indirect speech is a feature of resistance literature. The writer presents it through the styles of language, which they might use. In such cases, the boundary between author and character cannot be decided and the reader is not sure who is speaking. It can be seen in the novel abundantly. For instance "what sense the world make, where was God, the bloody fool? Did he have no notion of fair and unfair? Couldn't he read a simple balance sheet?" (595). After perusing these lines from the novel *A Fine Balance* we are not sure if the speaker of these lines is Maneck or the author. At the same time, Maneck's frustration at the injustice of the world, he inhabits is expressed through these words.

Most of the resistance literature ends either in misery or in tragedy; the mentioned novel is no exception. For instance, in this novel, Maneck wants to change the old and ancient setup of the shop, which is resisted by his father. He feels that he is humiliated. He takes it to the heart when he is ragged by the

senior student in the hostel of the campus. Eventually, he jumps in front of the running train and loses his life. The novel craftily expresses the voice of subalterns. The most obvious accomplishment of the novel is its realistic portrayal of the brutalities of lives of the people, who are living in dreadful poverty. The novel evokes the readers' sympathy. Mistry uses the tradition of realism to talk about the evils of modern India and to give a voice to middle and lower middle class Parsis.

Mistry, in fact, assimilates national politics with the main plot of his narrative which is the fate of the subaltern and the minority in the pre and post independent era. *A Fine Balance* provides a mocking comment on the power of the elites in which the marginalized and the powerless had no role to play. Most of the marginalized succumb to the pressure; Avinash is brutally murdered, Maneck commits suicide, Ishvar and Om are forced to undergo sterilization which leaves them deformed and destitute, Dina loses her much needed independence and self respect. The society presented by Mistry is not an idealized society. Superstition, and gender inequalities are pervasive everywhere. It is also the site of the repetition of caste-based brutality. The lower castes are beaten and killed for trivial reasons. The minorities in India do not look for economic and technological growth but for equality, justice, satisfactory basic needs and coexistence because, "In the end, it's all a question of balance." (Mistry, 22)

Thus, Mistry has shown the resistance of subalterns against the atrocities and exploitation of so-called rich and upper-caste people of contemporary India society in the mentioned novel. By showing the resistance from the part of the subalterns, he is trying to show the growing consciousness among underclass or subalterns in India.

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