CHAPTER IV

VICTIMIZATION AMONG OTHER SUBALTERNS

“I felt her wounds were calling me, crying out in almost inaudible tongues, Her suffering had a language we did not yet understand.”

- Meena Alexander in Nampally Road

In a conflict, everyone in society suffers but it is women who mostly bear the brunt. In societies, which face protracted conflicts, the social breakdown is prolonged through many years. Violence becomes part of the fabric of society, it trickles down from state, to community, to family as society struggles to cope with horrors from the conflict. Unfortunately, issues such as violence against women are less prioritized leaving millions of women alone and in danger. Widespread impunity continues to be enjoyed by perpetrators of rape and other forms of violence committed against women. Members of the police forces who are suspects in criminal cases are frequently transferred away from the area in which the crime allegedly takes place. The consequences of this impunity is devastating for the individual victims who are effectively denied access to criminal and civil remedies, including reparations.

Gender as social and psychological construct have forced women to accept role restrictions in both the realm of life i.e. public as well as private. As a result of patriarchal society, battering, rape, sexual abuse, verbal abuses are weapons used against women to subjugate and keep them under control.

Ensuring law and order for those who need protection by creating confidence in those who find themselves incapable of safeguarding themselves or their belongings and
enforcing law and order on those who disrupt and interfere with the lives of other peace loving citizens is the basis of their job description. This executive arm of the law is known as the police.

Protection of the weaker sections of society, and maintaining law and order are their prime duties. Protecting the constitutional rights of the citizen is now the primary function of the police once the constitution came into being on 26th January 1950. However, today the very name of police, instead of assurance, evokes fear. A failure of the law and order system is due to a breakdown of social and personal responsibility by the police and apathy towards the prompt carrying out of duty and personal greed and gain.

The reality of mistreatment during police custody is a horrifying one. *The Indian Express* on the 17th of February, 2009 ran this article:

Almost 11 years after it signed the UN convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, the Indian Government has finally initiated steps to have a law to check torture by making it a punishable offence through the prevention of Torture Bill, 2008.

Crimes against women are numerous even outside and inside the bars of the jails, but custodial stories bring a sense of fear that will keep women from seeking justice even if they are harassed to the point of death as in reporting dowry cases. When a woman comes forward to register a case she has to face various obstacles at the hands of those who are supposed to give justice to her. This is well portrayed by Arundhati Roy in her *The God of Small Things*. When Ammu goes to the Kottayam police station to seek justice for her beloved Velutha, injustice is meted out to her. The policeman at the
station “stared at Ammu’s breasts as he spoke” (8). He also adds that he does not “take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children,” and “Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently, Tap, tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered” (8). If such cruel and inhuman treatment is possible in the arena where people throng to beg for justice, one can imagine the plight of the subordinates in other arenas.

Ammu is met with shame and disgrace because she is voiceless as a woman, as a divorcee and as the one who has crossed her borders by loving an “untouchable”. The police inspector is already bribed by Baby Kochamma, the power centre of the house. Ammu is not the only sufferer in the police station, in other words, power house, but Velutha, an “Untouchable Paravan”, who is loved by Ammu and her two children to death, is the ultimate sufferer. Roy describes the brutality thus:

They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man’s breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib... His (Velutha’s) skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth . . . His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. 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. (310)

Velutha dies in custody “abandoned by God and History by Marx, by Man, by Woman and by Children” (310). To cover up police brutality a confession is extracted from Estha, that Velutha had kidnapped the three children.

The concept of power is central to politics. Various groups in the caste ridden Indian society have acquired power through different means and methods. Atrocities take place when the traditional society refuses to concede to the assertion of Dalits. When the behaviour of Dalits poses a challenge to the traditionally accepted ways of social behavior, there are atrocities on them. As long as they function within the parameters of caste paradigm and carry on their old occupation, they are no threat to the power. Conflicts ensue when they assert their right to equality which the upper classes deny to them. Roy subtly remarks thus: “They chose him because they knew that they had to put their faith in fragility” (339). The intention of Baby Kochamma and the Police Inspector Thomas Mathew is to “exorcise fear” (309) in Velutha and Velaya Pappen the representatives of the “untouchables”. As Roy observes, “After all they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (309).

Police atrocity and custodial deaths are rampant all over India. Dalits and women are the most affected by this issue, such social issues always find places in the novels of socio-political novelists like Roy, Meena Alexander, Mistry and Bhabani Bhattacharya.

The novel *Nampally Road* begins with Nagarjuna’s quotation: “If fire is lit in water, who can extinguish it?” What factors were instrumental in setting the water ablaze
have been enumerated. The first being the suppression of civil liberties by Khadi-clad
iron-fisted Prime Minister by imposing emergency, thus letting loose a reign of terror by
her henchman—the Ever Ready Battery of Limca Gowda who is ambitious to rise to the
grandeur of the Nizam. The Chief Minister wants to re-create the history of Golconda
arranging the vulgar show of pomp in face of toiling millions’ struggle for a square meal or
a tube of ointment where festering wound in a child’s brain is infested with maggots. The
next factor is the colossal drain of public money on cardboard city, arches, cut-outs
whereas just demands of a peaceful march of the orange sellers is brutally squashed.

The novel focuses on the ambition of power drunk politicians, who say the king is
dead:

If one Nizam is ousted there is a mushroom growth of Limca Gowda and
people like him throughout the country. If the Nizam had his fun and
frolic in watching his countries jumping in boiling water to catch pearls
with their teeth and lose their skin in the process, the neo Nizams are in
no way kind or compassionate. Their kith and kin enjoy the permit of
manufacturing Limca whereas the basic amenities in slums are altogether
ignored... For the poor man day today existence is a struggle for survival.

(75-77)

Meena Alexander’s Nampally Road also pathetically narrates the most inhuman treatment
meted out to Rameeza Be in a police station. After murdering her husband, while on her
way back to a theatre, she is taken to the police station forcefully on a false charge and
is gang raped. The fraility of woman is always taken for granted by the powerful colonizers.
The colonized is not at all considered as a human entity by the colonizers. A single flower
is crushed by many, forcefully, in a place where everyone is supposed to approach for justice.

In *Nampally Road* the plot revolves around Mira, a young girl who returns to India with great hopes. To her dismay, she “finds herself into the city’s ongoing political unrest” (15). Her idea of nationalism is shattered by the neocolonial elites through their exploitation of the poor and misuse of a political power. During such political unrest, Rameeza Be, the poor woman of a minority religion is molested by policemen. Women are especially targeted during communal violence or any violence.

India’s constitution is a value-based document. It guarantees equality of sexes, but somehow on the way to implementation, the guarantees get lost. Gender sensitivity needs to be of prime concern when new laws are drafted and implemented keeping in mind that at times her life is at stake.

But even then, policemen are also often victimized by politicians or by higher authorities. Powers need to keep their hands off the police force for their own personal gains. They need to let them function freely rather than place them under treat of transfers, suspensions etc. They need specialized training according to their job description equipment, perks and salaries that make the nation proud. On seeing the policemen beating the orange sellers Alexander says, “I had seen the same policemen who beat the orange sellers over the head riding bicycles in a general strike a year ago, their right fists raised. Many of them were desperately poor. They needed a pay raise”(28). To quote Dr. Dalbir Bharti, IPS Officer in his book, *People and Police: Their Rights and Responsibilities*,
The public criticizes the police... they are made fun of in movies, criticized in the Newspapers... surrounded by unhelpful lawyers, kept far away from the common man, has to face many difficulties and dangers, if he applies the law, he is judged for it and if he does not, he is suspended . . . he is expected to be a soldier, doctor, politician and an educationist while his salary is lower than that of a daily paid laborer. (67) (Not a literal translation from Hindi)

In many cases the police are known for their inaction and insensitivity towards the complaint, which at times amounts to outright harassment. It is only when police become responsible that our country will become a safe place to live in.

Policemen have to change their attitude towards the marginalized. They can do this by looking back, that is, go back to the values and national leaders who were known for their value-based lives they led. Roy, in her novel, while describing the police station scene where Ammu is verbally and non verbally abused by the Syrian Christian Police Inspector, states:

Behind him a red and blue board said:

Politeness
Obedience
Loyalty
Intelligence
Courtesy
Efficiency (8)
If every policeman incorporates these ideals into his personal and professional life, then they do justice to their profession. Likewise, Meena Alexander in her Nampally Road describes the police station and the police men where Rameeza Be, a married young woman of minority group is gang raped, She says:

Two portraits hung above the platform, two visitors from our history, Gandhi drawn in faded brown ink with parted lips, tiny brown spectacles and a bent nose. He held a telephone in his right hand. I noticed the mosquitoes buzzing over the bit of the glass frame where his spectacles were. To the right was a portrait of Nehru, erect, handsome, his cap pointed, polished on his head. His teeth gleamed in the photograph, clearly brushed each morning, an aristocrat lacking a phone line with the future. (57)

The pictures of Gandhi and Nehru are hung in every police station in order to remind the policemen of the moral values and ideals the nationalistic leaders stood for. The poor, voiceless Rameeza is raped in front of such national leaders who had sacrificed their entire life for the sake of their countrymen. Velutha is beaten to death in front of those who raised their voice for the marginalized and the downtrodden.

Such things happen not only in police stations but at times in courts too. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s He Who Rides a Tiger talks about this issue. Kalo, the poor blacksmith decides to leave for Calcutta in order to find a job and fair wages, because the plague washed up in force tides – “Bengal was dying. Jharna was dying” (15). Kalo has to live for his beloved intelligent daughter Chandralekha. Despite the rush on the train with empty stomach, he travels on the footboard of a train which takes all the poor and the dying to Calcutta. Kalo “clung for his life. Once every half-hour the train stopped and
he slipped to the platform, jumping back to the footboard only when the train started to move” (28).

With “a gnawing in his own belly” (29) Kalo peeps inside the first class compartment. There a man sleeps cosily in his bed unaware and unmindful of the hungry lot, leaving a bunch of ripe bananas by his side. Kalo has never been so hungry in his life. A dizziness and fatigue fill his head. Kalo now enters the compartment and grabs the bananas. But a strong hand captures him and it is a policeman in plain clothes. The policeman very well knows that Bengal is dying of famine and that people from all towns and villages are migrating to Calcutta hoping to find some job as “the capital city was the workshop of war weapons, so there, for certain would be no idleness” (19).

When there is no security for young girls in the city, there are guards for bananas. While leaving Jharna town, Kalo had instructed his daughter thus: “Take great care of yourself while I am away. Strangers are prowling in our streets with evil in eye and heart” (21). Bengal is taken by plague “in its grip, the plague of hunger in the wake of war” (15) and everywhere there is emptiness. The peasants sell off their grain and the tradesmen hide the grain and the tillers sell their lands in order to buy rice which is five times higher than the old rate. So the policeman too must be suffering but he guards a man who sleeps in the first class and his bananas too, might be for a handful of rice. He is aware of the hunger of the people and must have been more humane towards Kalo. Kalo is arrested as a “thief” and later taken to the criminal court. Bhabani exposes the double standards of the power structure. There are only two divisions in India and that is “haves” and “havenots”. The rich are able to sleep in the first class compartment while
poor hungry people cling to the footboard of a train which speaks a lot about the value of a human being in India. A human being is valued for what he “has”.

Even the judicial system often becomes a prey to the political power. The judge asks Kalo for the reason for his theft. Kalo is full of faith upon the set of values in the law. He believes in the law which is “the instrument which served out justice even to the poor” (30). He is bold enough to state the bare facts and looking at the eyes of judge and pleads guilty. He goes on to say that “I was hungry. Sir. A madness came upon me. It was because I thought I had to eat or I would die. A madness came upon me. I had to live.” The three bananas on the table as an exhibit were over-ripe and rotting” (31). After surveying Kalo sternly, the magistrate in reply asks Kalo “Why did you have to live?” (31). This question is still posed to millions of marginalized whenever they raise their voice against any kind of atrocity, or whenever they demand their rights to live a reasonable decent life, by politicians. To such politicians these millions are just vote bank and it is enough if their needs are met during the elections.

Inside the prison, Kalo finds “common people charged with petty theft” (35). In the post colonial era, so far not a political leader is arrested and punished for bribery, for the misuse of the government vehicle, for the non-payment of telephone bills and for not vacating their allotted bungalows after they are voted out of power or for not fulfilling their electoral promises to the common man. Police officials are treated almost like their domestic servants. At times judicial policies are in tune with the government policies and that shows the power of the Indian bougeoisie society.

If a judge does not know the reason why people like Kalo should live, then one wonders who else does: “A magistrate who knew nothing of the meaning of hunger sent
him to prison as a common thief” (107). Food is the primary requisite of human dignity and hunger debases and dehumanizes man.

Roy’s Velutha is brutally murdered by the police and Ammu is forced to quit the house and thereby decides to commit suicide. The reason behind this atrocity is caste politics:

It had been in the papers. The news of Sophie Mol’s death, of the police ‘Encounter’ with a Paravan charged with kidnapping and murder. They (the policemen) woke Velutha with their boots. If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him had been severed long ago... After all, they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak... Velutha didn’t live through the night... the body had already been removed. Dumped in the themmady kuzhy, the pauper’s pit–where the police routinely dump their dead. (308, 309)

All such inhuman atrocities happen to Velutha, because of his marginalized position as belonging to a lower caste.

Meena Alexander’s Rameeza Be is gang raped by the police men in the police station after directly witnessing her husband’s cold blooded murder by the hooligans. The reason behind this is power politics. Rameeza Be is a rape victim. She has to raise her voice regarding the brutal murder of her husband. But the political structure which is so ‘powerful’ in India which can turn anything upside down announces Rameeza as ‘the source of turbulence” (59). Ever Ready men are on the look out for the victim and not
for the victimizers. Such is the power structure of many Limca Gowdas in post colonial India.

The novelist is extremely critical when she sees institutions veering away from these ideals. She depicts the political life in the country from the immediate post-independence era, when political titans were at the helm of affairs. The main event in the novel is the birthday celebration of Limca Gowda, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. In the novelist’s words:

Fully authorized by his own ruling party, Limca Gowda had decided to turn his dreams to good use. His office was now run from the old fort of Golconda, the rulers of ancient Hyderabad. It was rumoured that for his birthday celebrations fast approaching now, he would take hold of history with an iron hand, mix and march as he desired, dress up as the last Qutubshahi, and music the mad gestures of the dead Nizam... (38)

He is an Indian politician in every sense. The notion of unquestioned power rested in a single man pleased him enormously. Those who are in power should be greatly dedicated, live a life of austerity and sacrifice and show exemplary behaviour, whereas Limca Gowda assumes an almost Hitlerian personality and suppresses the marginalized. No ruler is entitled to obedience and respect unless he or she is willing to pay heed to people’s aspirations and needs.

The road once fairly quiet, turns into a noisy thoroughfare because of the birthday celebrations of the Chief Minister. The tax money of the common people is spent like water. Limca Gowda has his Ever Ready gang at his side all the time:
They ran his office. The Ever Ready men were suspicious of the Vice-Chancellor with his liberal ways. Once the old man had refused to shut down the student newspapers, refused even to censor editorials highly critical of the way money was being spent on the grand archways and glossy platforms that rose up, at enormous expense to the tax payers, like an elaborate stage, set, beribboned and pointed around the railway station or airport any time the Chief Minister was travelling... (39)

No one could raise their voice for any matter till Limca Gowda’s sixtieth birthday celebrations was over even if a woman is raped in police custody. The raped woman also has no voice though her suffering has a language. The government also does not incorporate any of the required measures that would give the woman some protection. The agitators are quickly arrested and carted off in the black vans by the reserve police.

What Alexander tries to convey is that the politicians may be corrupt but they are not indispensable. The novel is a convincing portrayal of the atrocities perpetuated during the Emergency period, the pomp and show accompanying the 60th birthday celebration of Limca Gowda, the Chief Minister and a henchman of the iron fisted Prime Minister’s utter neglect of masses, millions who are condemned to live a destitute life in slums, culminates in the eruption of lava in which Limca Gowda’s “Cardboard” city meets a fiery finale. Thus the poor, downtrodden and the ignorant are easily victimized by the political leaders who have enough power to amend, mend and end:

As I approached the crossroads by the Gandhi statue I saw the wooden begging bowls and tin pots the beggars had dropped . . . . the beggars
who lived outside the small Shiva temple were rounded up by the special police. They were dragged into black vans and driven to the outskirts of the city, then forced out into the ruins of the old fort. Someone had calculated that it would take than a day and a half to walk back, and by then the great celebrations would be over. Hyderabad had to be kept beautiful, so the big signs said, posted all over the walls and pinned to the trees. Attached to the top of each poster was a photo of the Chief Minister holding a small boy’s hand. (99-100)

The novelist goes on describing how the ignorant villages are used to proclaim the glory of the Chief Minister Limca Gowda just for three free meals and a handful of rupees:

a truck with its load of cheering villagers drove by, “Limca is our father”, they sang out in tired voices. Some of them had been traveling all night. They had been enticed to the city with the promise of three free meals and a handful of rupees. The penalties for refusing were harsh. There was so little room in some of the trucks that few people could sit. So they stood for the long rider packed upright against each other, men and women and a whole horde of small children. Some of the larger children rode in a separate truck. They waved small replies of the national flag. But instead of Gandhi’s symbol of the spinning wheel at the centre of the tricolour, these flags had Limca Gowda’s face, a simplified silhouette, but unmistakable, a craggy blackened thing. (101)

Likewise, the state of Emergency plays a major role in the miserable lives of Om, Ishavar, Maneck and Dina Dalal in A Fine Balance. The Emergency saw the suspension of the
basic fundamental rights guaranteed to every Indian citizen by the constitution of India. For the very first time since India had been decolonized in 1947, democratic institutions were suspended. The novel is a richly detailed human narrative of the intertwined fates of four ordinary lives of the “dispossessed”, as Mistry puts it, who come together by chance at the height of Mrs. Gandhi’s Emergency in 1975:

   It is the Emergency, that gets represented most realistically in the novel. Ishvar and Om are now homeless and end up as pavement dwellers. They are taken away to a nearby irrigation project site where they are made to work as manual laborers. Ishvar and Om are forcibly castrated and soon become beggars. (239)

   The cancer of corruption and criminilization of politics, which had already been eating into the vitals of nation, flared up in the Emergency and spread its tentacles far and wide often with a nod of official approval. The roots of the Emergency lay in the effort to subvert the law and to retain power through wrong and illegal means. Quickly narrating the early events of the period, Avinash, a student leader says:

      Under the pretext of Emergency, fundamental rights have been suspended, most of the opposition is under arrest, union leaders are in jail and even some student leaders... But the worst thing is the press is being censored...

      And she has retroactively changed the election laws turning her guilt into innocence (245).

   This is just the beginning, Worse is still to follow. The hoardings of Indira Gandhi and the painting of Government slogans are just the outer trapping which cannot deceive the
people. A campaign with a euphemistic name “City Beautification Scheme” actually results in the bulldozing of the slums and forcing the roofless poor to pass their nights on pavements or railway platforms, carrying, like Ishvar and Om, their boxes or bundles everyday to their places of work. When a party worker tells this to men and women standing in a queue for collecting water from a tap, the reaction is interesting:

‘The Prime Minister’s message is that she is your servant and wants to help you. She wants to hear things from your own lips.’

‘Tell her yourself’, some shouted, ‘You can see in what prosperity we live.’

‘Yes, Tell her how happy we are! Why do we need to come?’

‘If she is our servant, tell her to come here.’

‘Ask your men with the cameras to pull some photos of our lovely houses, our healthy children! Show that to the Prime Minister!’ (258)

But inspite of the protest of the people, they are forced with caning and slapping to obey. Such incidents create a sense of disillusionment and disaffection among the masses: “Daily I see cases where people end up making the pavement their home. Lying there exhausted, lost, defeated. The amazing thing is how quickly they learn to use cardboard and plastic and newspaper” (569). The novelist has described the consequential working out of the Emergency so effectively that one whole heartedly agrees with when Vasantrao Valmik, a lawyer, whose conscience breaks out in high-flown language full of poetic allusions, quotes his favourite poet: “I am inspired by the poet Yeats. I find his words especially
relevant during this shameful Emergency. You know things fall apart, centre not holding, anarchy loosed upon the world and all that sort of thing” (566).

Besides Emergency, events like Civil Disobedience Movement of 1975 have also been referred to in the novel. Dina Dalal does not remember the Quit India Movement of 1942 because she was too young, but the horrors of partition she does remember and the novelist implies that the Emergency horrors were no match to them. The murder of Avinash during the Emergency is matched by the suicide of his three sisters after the Emergency for their father had no money for their dowry. The novelist drives home the point that in individual life the lifting of the Emergency had made little difference:

Of course, for ordinary people nothing has changed. Government still keeps breaking poor people’s homes and in Jhopadpattis villages they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are made. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after it is performed. Living each day is to face one emergency or another. (581)

Things are no better for Maneck returning from Dubai. Maneck is aware of the assassination of the Prime Minister by one of her Sikh body guards, but not aware of the riots which followed it. He is in a hurry to attend his father’s funeral but no taxi driver assures him of a safe journey: “It’s right in the middle of the rioting. Too dangerous.... People are being beaten and butchered and burnt alive”(580). Soon Maneck is informed about the riots against the Sikhs and how it began--“It started when the Prime Minister was killed three days ago. She was shot by her Sikh bodyguards. So this is supposed to be revenge” (581). It has been eight years since Maneck has left India and he does not know anything
about the socio-political scenario. The taxi driver, the keen observer of the daily ‘activities’ of the government thus explains to Maneck:

‘That’s a very long time, Sahab. 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. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after nusshandhi is performed. Living each day is to face one emergency or another.’ (581)

Apart from riots against the Sikhs, the driver informs Maneck of the attack on the Golden Temple. He tries to trace the origin of the problem according to his point of view thus:

‘Same way all her problems started. With her own mischief-making. Just like in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Assam, Tamil Nadu. In Punjab, she was helping one group to make trouble for state government. Afterwards the group became so powerful, fighting for separation and Khalistan, they made trouble for her only. She gave her blessings to the guns and bombs, and then these wicked, violent instrument’s began hitting her own government. How do they say in English – all her chickens came have for roasting, isn’t it? . . . . She made the problem worse and worse, telling the army to attack the Golden Temple and capture the terrorists. With tanks and what – all big guns they chased inside, like hooligans. How much damage to the shrine. It is the most sacred place for Sikhs, and everybody’s feelings were hurt’ (582).
The Sikhs, the minority group was targeted but along with them, everyone, that is, the poor and the downtrodden suffered a lot. The taxi driver continues to say thus:

She created a monster, and the monster swallowed her. Now it swallows innocents. Such terrible butchery for three days. They are pouring kerosene on Sikhs and setting them on fire. They catch men, tear the hair from their faces or hack it with swords, then kill them. Whole families burnt to death in their homes. (582)

The driver who represents the ordinary civilian of post colonial India is able to vividly dissect the socio-political anarchy. Politicians who plot dangerous plans are fooled because they always presume that their masks always help them to cover their identities. But an ordinary auto wala is able to locate everything and every body in its proper place. The victims are all very clear who victimizes them but since they are powerless and voiceless, they talk either to themselves or just murmur carefully not to be heard.

The last chapter in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* is a clear analytical picture of the misuse of political power and its atrocities against the subalterns. The taxi driver has made it very very clear about the pathetic plight of the poor Indians:

Suddenly, all the incidents narrated by the man of mutilation and bludgeoning and decapitation, the numerous ways that mobs had of breaking bones, piercing flesh and spilling blood–everything that Maneck had been listening to with detachment now achieved a stark reality in the razor’s nicks.(583)

Maneck explains the socio-political situation usually witnessed in India and states, “The real murderers will never be punished. For votes and power they play with human lives.
Today it is Sikhs. Last year it was Muslims, before that, Harijans. One day, your Sudra and Kusti might not be enough to protect you” (583).

Apart from the taxi driver, Maneck is informed a lot by the newspaper that he finds in his father’s shop. It informs him of the abuses during the Emergency, testimony of fortune victims, outrage over the countless deaths in police custody. Maneck is shocked to read about the suicidal death of Avinash’s and his three sisters:

Dressed in cholis and petticoats, they were hanging from a ceiling fan. One end of each of their saris was tied to the fan hook, the other round their necks. Their necks were tilted. The arms hang limp, like the limps of rag dolls. …The three were sisters, aged fifteen, seventeen and nineteen, and had hanged themselves while their parents were out of the house. They had written a note to explain their conduct. They knew that their father was unhappy at not being able to afford dowries for them. After much debate and anxiety, they had decided to take this step, to spare their mother and father the shame of three unmarried daughters. They begged their parents’ forgiveness for this action which would cause them grief; they could see no alternative... the three sisters looked disappointed, he thought, as though they had expected something more out of hanging, something more than death, and then discovered that death was all there was. (594)

Avinash’s parents lose their dear three daughters and it is because of dowry, an excruciating social evil. During the Emergency, they lose their only son, whose death remains a mystery
to the parents. “They 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… it would appear to be one more case wrongful death in police custody” (594).

The novel *A Fine Balance* abounds with the miserable and horrible incidents forced upon women, poor and the downtrodden who find it difficult to raise their voice against the power structure, namely the Emergency during Indira Gandhi’s regime of post colonial India. It is a subtle and compelling narrative about four unlikely characters who come together in circumstances no one could have foreseen soon after the government declares State of Internal Emergency. Whether it is political power or police force or phallo centric force, every power centre victimizes the subaltern. Such voiceless creatures are the targets of such powers. Every government pledges upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden. They say that they are all development agendas and plans for the marginalized but everything ends badly for the marginalized and the rich and the powerful go undisturbed for years together.

Mistry transforms the historical situations and the reality of Indian life into a metaphor that shows that the individual reacts to widespread corruption when entangled in its grasp and how people respond to such endless victimization by the government and the society. The two tailors fall a victim to India’s cruelest social constraint, the caste system. The victims of Emergency in the novel face humiliation in every form possible, torment in a government-run work camp, torture, violation of human decency, bitter disappointment and disillusionment.
The novel is a moving portrait of life during the Emergency period. It is true with
the novel because India is suffering with its timeless chain of caste–exploitation, male-
chauvinism, communal strifes and power politics. Mistry enables the reader to have an
inside view of the Indian polity where a struggle for power is on. The power-hungry
politicians control the strings of administration like a puppeteer:

‘Who knows why, madam. Why is these disease and starvation and
suffering? We can only answer the how and the where and the when of it.
The Prime Minister cheats in the election, and the relevant law is promptly
modified. Ergo, she is not guilty. We poor mortals have to accept the
bygone events are beyond our clutch, while the Prime Minister performs
juggling acts with time past’(563).

The lawyer, thus, vividly describes the pitiable plight of the victims of the power structure.
He not only talks of hope but also of despair:

‘True, there are goondas galore in the wilderness of our time. After all,
this is Goonda Raj. So who can blame you for taking that route? Who
would want to enter the soiled Temple of Justice, wherein lies the corpse
of Justice, slam by her very guardians? And now her killers make mock
of the sacred process, selling replicas of her behind virtue to the highest
bidder’ (563).

As a lawyer, Mr. Valmik’s loss is great during the Emergency period. He goes on
to say:
‘Unfortunately, during this Emergency, morchas and demonstrations are banned by the government. So far the past year I have sat on this broken bench, armed with my law degree. The circle is completed… How much I have lost, in describing the circle. Ambition, solitude, words, eye sight, vocal cords. In fact this is the central theme of my life story–loss . . . . Loss is essential. Loss is part and parcel of that necessary calamity called life. …..Losing, and losing again, is the very basis of the life process, till we are left with is the bare essence of human existence’ (565-6).

Since elections are master-minded by the landlords like Thakur Dharamsi, Narayan’s attempt at voting to make his mark himself results in the ruin of his family by being burnt alive by the goondas of Thakur Dharamsi. The police finds ‘nothing’ to support charges of arson and murder. So no F.I.R. can be registered. In fact, the police is at the mercy of powerful people like Dharamsi, and become victims themselves.

The novel gives a depressing picture by Mistry and gives hope to live through the trauma if only one could learn to live like Dina Dalal, Ishvar and Om by balancing hope and despair, by adjusting, which is the only another way for the victims of marginalization: “There is always hope–hope enough to balance our despair. Or we would be lost” (563).

According to Mr. Vasantrao Valmik, a proof reader in the novel, “the secret of survival is to embrace change and to adapt”(230). This novel is about the oppressors and the oppressed, about the caste system with its multifarious drawbacks, it is about the malfunctioning of administrative and police functioning during the days of the Emergency and its effects on all walks of life. As Hilary Mantel suggests in his review of A Fine Balance, “A Fine Balance is about imposed patterns, and the double-edged search for
order in flux on both individual and national level... Mistry’s writing manages both to carry the hallmarks of a diasporic consciousness and concern for the mutability of people and places” (4-6).

When Dina Dalal has to face the goondas and when she is asked to evict the house, she boldly and confidently says that she has the right to go to the court. For that the goodas reply sympathetically,

Actually speaking, madam, there is nothing I can do. Sometimes the law works just like a lemon-and-spoon-race. The eviction has to take place. You can appeal later... courts are useless. Arguments and adjournments, testimony and evidence takes forever. All those stupid things are unnecessary under the Emergency. (567)

Thus, Dina is forced to empty her house and she is guided and assisted by Sergeant Kesar. Here Dina is all alone. Om and Ishvar leave and abandon her to face the Emergency all alone. She is not the only victim, but also Sergeant Kesar. He says, “If I did not have a family to feed, you think I would do this job? Especially after the ulcers it has given me? Since the Emergency began, my ulcers began. At first I though it was just stomach acidity. But doctor has confirmed the diagnosis. I have to be operated soon” (568).

The relationship between art and society cannot be ignored. A work of literature contributes to the reaffirmation or devaluation of people’s ideas, goals and values; it sometimes moves and many times shakes people. As Ngugi wa Thiong’O puts it,
Literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield . . . what he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics. (7)

It is Rohinton Mistry’s novels that deal with major political strifes and also advance a significant debate. Mistry’s Such a Long Journey revolves around the Bangladesh war of 1971. It is a political book that deals with the victimization of power politics. The novelist offers commentary on the socio-political situation and raises a national debate on corruption in high places. Some characters in the novel make really illuminating comments. For instance, Gustad thinks about the position of the Parsis in Bombay and comments thus: “No future for minorities with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America – twice as good as the white man to get half as much.” (55)

It is the Nagarwala case which provides the main plot for Mistry’s Such a Long Journey. The novel extends actual historical events beyond the curtain of silence in which the official discourses have tried to enshroud them. Since Nagarwala was a Parsi, a victim of the hegemony of the state, the tale could only have been told by a Parsi.

The narrative depicts the collision between the tyranny of the system and Gustad, the Parsi protagonist making him its ultimate victim. The novelist places his protagonist
in a marginalized community in Bombay in the tradition of post colonial literature. While criticizing the novel Arun Mukherjee states that Mistry’s choice of an event from the contemporary Indian history is deliberate.

In the opening of the novel, Gustad is seen as a god fearing man, the envy of all. He has been met with an accident which leaves him with a slight limp. He is a bank employee with three children, two sons and a daughter. They are Sohrab, Daruis and Roshan respectively. Life has its own sudden twists and turns. Gustad is shocked to know that his close friend and a neighbour, Major Billimoria, has disappeared. Secondly, his son Sohrab refuses to enroll himself as an IIT student, whose bad manners and violent temper spoilt the ninth birthday party of Roshan, which results in his desertion of his home; Thirdly, his only daughter becomes ill with a complicated illness; Fourthly, Gustad all on a sudden, gets a package from Major Billimoria and Gustad has to hide the ten lakh rupees; Fifthly, Gustad’s close friend Dinshawji falls ill and eventually he dies; Next, another neighbour Tehmul Lungraa, a retarded child dies all on a sudden; And lastly, the municipal authority destroys Gustad’s sacred compound wall, wall of Khodadad building where Gustad and his neighbours reside.

Gustad had been waiting for a long time to receive a letter from Major Billimoria but contrarily, he receives a package wherein he finds a large sum of money which is supposed to be deposited in a bank in the name of one Mira Obili. Gustad and his son do not know how to hide such a huge amount.

Even before the money is deposited, the news is smelt by others. His neighbours reveal everything to the inspector. Somehow he manages to deposit the money in the bank and he reveals everything to his friend Dinshawji. Dinshawji discloses everything
to Laurie Coutino, a typist in the bank, where both Gustad and Dinshawji are working, impersonating himself as a man working for secret service. After this Dinshawji completely changes into a serious person.

The story reaches its climax, and the arrest of major Bilimoria on charges of corruption is published in the paper. Gustad’s horizon is completely darkened with fear and uncertainty. In the meantime, Gustad is asked to return the whole amount in one month’s time to save Major Bilimoria’s life. To make things worse, Roshan’s illness continues. Gustad is haunted by poverty. He is unable to make both ends meet and sells his camera and his wife’s two gold marriage bangles. Dinshawji is hospitalized after a sudden collapse in the office. Gustad prays to Mount Mary for the recovery of Dinshawji and his daughter Roshan. But Dinshawji meets with death. Soon after that Gustad makes a trip to Delhi to meet Major Bilimoria who wants to tell him all that had happened. It is a big fraud of sixty lakh rupees in which the Prime Minister gets directly involved. Bilimoria is asked to get the money from the SBI Director on an emergency basis to finance the guerrilla training pending official sanction by impersonating the Prime Minister’s voice on the telephone. After that Major Bilimoria is asked to write a confession, which he does, without any second thought. But as soon as the money is received, the Prime Minister’s office intercepts the money before it is used for the original purpose. Knowing the trick, Bilimoria keeps ten lakh rupees for distribution to his friends. Before long he is arrested and is kept under detention and tortured cruelly until he returns the money. Bilimoria gets four years imprisonment, and while serving his term he dies of heart attack. Now Roshan’s condition improves and the family returns to normalcy. The dispute between the father and the prodigal son comes to an end. Towards the end, the outer wall of
Khodadad building is about to be broken by the Municipal workers, at the request of Gustad. He wants to save the wall from pollution, the horrible smell of urine and excrement and from the flies and mosquitoes bred there. The destruction is checked by many but the work goes on. The heated verbal argument leads to stone throwing and Tehmul Lungraa is targeted. Gustad prays for all and a change comes over Gustad. He comes out of himself to be one with death and one with life. He is now able to forgive his son.

The grandeur the book attains is the creation of the central character, Gustad Noble, in whose life and suffering a large rhythm of universal pattern is carved out. Everything in the novel happens as if some immanent will is firmly set to counter human action as in an epic or a heroic tragedy. Like Oedipus, he bows to the will of providence. He also finds a dignity and greatness in endurance.

At one level Gustad’s fate resembles the fate of India. India, like Gustad, confronted with wars and the aftermath, is under trauma and limps awkwardly. Various characters belonging to Parsi community are victims of fear and anxiety. Political power and corruption forms the most vital pattern of empowerment in Such a Long Journey. Major Bilimoria is trapped by the snares of political power and corruption at higher places. He is arrested on the charge of extorting sixty lakh rupees from the bank by impersonating Prime Minister’s voice. It may be pointed out that Jimmy is none other than the fictional counterpart of Nagarwala who was arrested and exterminated during Indira Gandhi’s regime. This incident has jolted the image of the whole Parsi community, because the victim is a Parsi. Mistry harshly comments through the character thus:
Assuming that Mr. Bilimoria has the talent of voice impersonation, is it routine for our national banks to hand over vast sums of money if the Prime Minister telephones? How high up does one have to be in the government or the congress party to be able to make such a call? And was the chief cashier so familiar with Mrs. Gandhi’s voice that he accepted the instructions without any verification whatsoever? If yes, does that mean that Mrs. Gandhi has done this sort of thing frequently. (195)

The fictional world Mistry creates in the novel, is no utopia of any kind. It is a picture of the fallen world in which all forms of corruption, knavery, hypocrisy, tyranny, ugliness and decay have become the order of the day in the post colonial era. The society depicted is completely deprived of resilience. Mistry’s sensitivity at the sight of stinking human condition and rampant corruption turns him into a realist, who is obliged to expose the world around him, war between nations, the complete lack of commitment on the part of the big powers, and the degenerating political scenario in the international politics. The nationalistic fervour in the novelist makes him at times a ruthless critic of the corrupt government at the centre.

Like many postcolonial writers, Mistry challenges the official version of the Nagarwala case which remained alive in the popular imagination. He employs the available public versions like popular gossip, newspaper reports, diaries and letters to underline and dismantle power structures. Thus, Gustad stands for the marginalized in the narrative who challenges the hegemony of the State. Through Gustad, the sense of insecurity of the Parsi Community speaks. Bilimoria is a victim figure who is exploited by the ‘people
at the very top’. Mistry’s attempt is to depict the Parsi predicament in the corrupt Indian society in the post-independence era.

Politics, because of historical reasons, has occupied a central position in India thinking and subsumes the ways in which power is manipulated in various transactions in day-to-day life. How people are victimized by power politics is also dealt by Bhabhani Bhattacharya in his *So Many Hungers!* Apart from political victimization, rich-poor class divide is also discussed in this novel. One of the factors of caste segregation can be formed as poverty. The economic disparity, thus, leads to many social evils like class destructions, juvenile crimes and child trafficking, to name a few.

The special popularity of Bhattacharya’s novels is that they hold a mirror to the Indian society. He deals with the social, religious, economic, political and even psychological aspects of Indian life. India is a land of unity in diversity. While the rich become richer, the poor become still poorer. The poor are exploited by the rich both on the economic plane and the intellectual plane. Although humans are ever the same on any soil, it is worse in the so-called ‘Karma bhoomi’ of India. There seems to be no one to curb the individual’s lust for power and money, lust which is heedless of the price in human sorrow and suffering and death. More than ninety per cent of the people are self-centred, ever ready to trade on the helpless victims of poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. Persons like Samarendra, Rahoul’s father are a speck in the ocean and get washed out unnoticed and uncared for. Conscience and scruples are of no avail amidst a race steeped in self acquisition. The rich know and take it for granted that the poor would rather be prepared to quit this ‘good earth’ than rebel against their atrocities: “Hideous death lurked everywhere pressing the city in its skeleton grip” (172). The rich would say, “It is your job to feed Government,
not Government’s job to feed you” (141). Hunger has their fate, an expiation of the sins of past lives.

Bhattacharya makes a dig into the deep vitals of the vicious atmosphere of Bengal’s economy at this crisis of famine. The administration is leprous with corruption from neck to heel:

Corruption had grown like an epidemic and money had become a mad hunger. Never in the land’s history had the process that made the rich richer, the poor poorer, gained such ruthless intensity. The authority took little need and set it aside as a passing phenomenon. But the poor suffered untold misery and the end of one tale was the beginning of another. (109).

The tale is told from the point of view of the starving peasants who migrated to Calcutta where they died in the streets, and is calculated to shock the reader’s sense of humanity in scenes such as that which describes a jackal perched on the thigh of a pregnant woman, tearing at her swollen belly while her screams slash the air.

It has been the misery of the poor peasants of India (the sons of the soil) to toil day and night and cultivate the land and it is a pity they live in perpetual poverty and hunger only to enable the landlord to flourish. It is he that produces but has nothing to consume. The fate of the Indian farmer whose life is crushed under the wheels of grinding poverty is drawn with a breadth of vision that anyone has hardly come across anywhere.

Poverty drives a man from home and nobody knows what becomes of him when he is in the streets. Kishore becomes the victim of circumstances and dies. How many lives make their exit from this ‘hell on earth’ nobody knows. Kajoli is raped and removed
to the hospital. Poverty, is thus, the anchor of the rich and they ride rough shod over the poor and commit all crimes and simply laugh at them and laugh away at their wretchedness.

The famine has directed its wrath on the poor Cow – Mangala too: “Mangala began to low piteously for a bite of grass, thick bones sticking out of her russet skin, eyes afraid, and begging, even her pair of strong curved horns looking oddly emacitated” (117). The last straw on the camel’s back of poverty is represented by a fisher woman digging a grave for her own live child. The Mother, despite her excruciating misery, is prepared to offer rice to the fisher-woman. It is an instance of the spirit of sacrifice. The poor Indians sacrifice everything to save a fellow-being, although they themselves become martyrs of the holy act.

The rich-poor divide is also discussed in Bhattacharya’s *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The misery of the poor, the contrast between property and poverty, goodness and hypocrisy, power and helplessness is drawn effectively. The novelist gives us a pathetic picture of innumerable indignities and cruelties to which the human beings were subjected during the famine. The famine has pulled down mankind to a despicable level. Famine did everything possible to crush, to destroy almost irretrievably. It caused not only the influx of the people into the cities but it made them do anything and everything depraved. It was the unfortunate beginning of the various kinds of perverse activities and exploitation. The human essence was squeezed out, all that was left being shallow, debased frames. The evil doers indulged in luring the village damsels and sent them to brothels; the lustful never lost an opportunity and the avaricious made money however and wherever they could. Everything was reduced to bestiality. Only the law of the brute prevailed. The novel mirrors the naked horrors of the famine, the ruthlessness of society and alone all
the psychological and superstitions temperament of the people. It is an irony of human nature that the rich people who treat the poor, as the meanest creatures crawling on the surface of the earth, do not mind offering any amount for worshipping the God with sincere hope that He would bless them in their immoral acts and unlawful and immoral transactions. Bhattacharya presents a deep insight into the fact that no one knows to what abysmal depths poverty degrades a man. Man loses all sense of values and becomes a slave to circumstances. The fate of the millions is written in the face of Kalo. The novel is political, economical and social.

Social concern—concern for the poor, the hungry, the destitutes born out of reascent humanism and of growing influence of social realism has been a prominent theme in the post colonial phase of Indian literature in English. When the whole nation was fighting against the tyranny of the British rule that had destroyed the Indian economy, the writers also joined hands with them. This situation led to the development of protest literature. Bhattacharya believes that the novel must have a social purpose. In the field of fiction Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Ruth Parwar Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya give full vent to their smoldering resentment against the economic and social evils in fictional terms. They have given powerful voice to the problem of hunger, starvation, human degradation and the social evil of casteism with sympathy for the victims and resentment for the victimizers.

In Bhattacharya’s novel So Many Hungers!, the protagonist suffers with all the situational variations, from a common predicament—the lot of millions of destitute living under similar conditions the world over as a result of imperialism. Hunger and famine, the result of World War II, are more aggravated by the monster of imperialism.
The story is made of two plots—one is of the young scientist, Rahoul and his family, and the other is of a peasant family with a young girl, Kajoli, as its principal character. The fixture of these two plots is inter-woven with the linking thread called Devesh Basu, the grandfather of Rahoul. The sad tale of Kajoli is a pathetic record of millions of people who became victims of a famine, not natural but the result of selfish and rapacious profiteers and the callous indifference of the British Government.

Samarendra Basu, Rahoul’s father, a shrewd and unscrupulous lawyer, greedy in matters of money, takes advantages of the fluctuating stock market trend by organising the Bengal cheap Rice Ltd. and boards a huge stock of rice. Sir Lakshmenath and Sir Abalabandu, the two black-marketer princes, join the enterprise and help it extend its branches to the distant corners of the province. They tempt the small farmers to sell not only their entire stock of rice but also the unharvested crops. The poor villagers are thus trapped and deprived of all their rice. While the hoarders, profiteers and black-marketeers flourish carrying on a thundering trade, the authorities sit passive. K.R.S. Iyengar comments thus: “the wells of human pity seem to have almost dried up, and only the jackals and vultures are in jubilant and vigorous action?” (413).

Bhattacharya has painted the naked horror of the man-engineered famine with pitiless precision and cumulative detail. The common people succumb to the threats and fortune of the British rulers, aptly presented in the novel:

Forty thousand country boats wantonly destroyed. Many villages evacuated. The uprooted people pauperized. Inflated currency, the spine of war finance, added the finishing touch, eating up the people’s purchasing power, reducing the small savings of a life time to a fifth of their worth. Nothing was left of
the foundation of life. Vultures perched on the trees, vultures wheeled or
hung poised in the sunlight air,…

Corpse lay by the road, huddled together... bits of skin and flesh rotting
on nose and chin and ribs, the skulls peeked open, only the hair uneaten…

A family group had sunk into sleep and beyond the sleep was vultures…..
heaven’s scavengers. Save for them the air of Bengal would be putrid
with the rotting flesh of man. Fellow human beings had ceased to care for
the living. How could they care for the dead? (141 – 143)

So while Rahoul and Devata fight against injustice, fraud and slavery, Kajoli and her
disintegrating family fight against hunger. The young, innocent peasant girl from Baruni
illustrates the cruel fate of two million innocent men, women and children of Bengal in the
grip of unprecedented rice famine, making a mass exodus to the city of Calcutta hoping
to be fed. The famine gets worse and there is nothing to eat:

The Battle of Bengal thickened. Human endurance ebbed. Hungry children
cried themselves to death. Streams of desperate men ventured art of
their ancestral homes in search of food, hanging on to the footboards of
the railway train, riding on the sun-baked roofs. But the police threw up
barriers…. (154)

Harish Raizada’s remarks that while “the restaurants of the rich city buzz with life and
music and bulge with food, destitute in the nearby lanes and pavements die sick, hungry...
and helpless” (29). The response of the rich Indians to the destitute is no different from
the response of the colonial rulers. Instead of feeding the hungry people, the colonial
rulers think of clearing the city of its destitute, dead of living.
Bhattacharya takes pain to give a balanced depiction of life in the novel. Men and women emanated by hunger, surrender themselves before heinously selfish men who are not much different from real vultures and jackals. One can read about boys fighting with other boys and animals for morsel of food from garbage bins. Some bony men scoop at the chewed food from other’s mouths. Hungry women are molested by soldiers; girls, standing on the pavements often pull down their jackets so as to expose their bosoms to soldier’s gaze, just to get some coins; millions of poor and marginalized die gasping for food; some more are waiting to die of disease.

While one section of Bengal is suffering like this, imperialists like Abalabandu and others are hungry for sex and they have enough money to spend to satiate their physical hunger. Even today, this happens in India. Famine and other disasters kill only the poor and the marginalized. They are victims to all kinds of man made evils. There seems to be two ‘India’s; one is Indians who have and the other is Indians who do not have. Those who have, are given more and more and their Swiss bank account overflows. Those who do not have, are often asked, “Why do you have to live?” The voiceless people answer this question, but the words go with the wind and the world is too busy to listen to the poor and helpless.

Victimization happens in all spheres of life. A recent survey states that child molestation or victimization has considerably increased and this may be due to the rise of divorce. As a social critic, Arundhati Roy has brought this aspect in her The God of Small Things. The social evil of child abuse and child negligence which is prevalent in India has been highlighted by Roy. Chapter four of the novel gives a repulsive and disturbing account of the encounter of Estha with the orange drink lemon drink man. In
a moment of negligence by the mother, the boy Estha saunters away to the refreshment
counter during the film-interval where his innocence is exploited by the orange drink
lemon drink man who uses the boy for his selfish sexual gratification.

As a result, the boy develops headache and starts vomiting. What the beastly
man does is highly unethical. This act of violence is deeply registered in Estha’s psyche
and since he has no father, he must have felt a sense of repressed anger on men like the
orange drink lemon drink man throughout his life. So, in a way or may be in every way,
the divorce of his mother affects both Estha and Rahel. Estha and Rahel are victims of
Ammu’s divorce and in turn, Ammu is a victim of her broken marriage.

While marriage is significant in one’s life, the intricacies of the separation is also
significant. Though divorce is still looked upon as a social evil, the law permits a couple
to separate ways on mutual grounds. Also, Indian women have their own rights to file for
a divorce if not treated well.

The decision to end a relationship can be traumatic, chaotic and filled with
contradictory emotions. There is a great disparity between the economic ramifications of
divorce between men and women. Men remain relatively unaffected while women, especially
those with children have emotional, economical and social difficulties. Chacko, a divorcee,
does not seem to be bothered about his plight and ‘somehow’ his needs are met. But it is
not so with Ammu, because she is the ‘other’. Often a woman is not able to rely on her
family for support because many parents feel they have discharged their obligations to a
daughter by arranging her marriage and providing a dowry. Dowries are not returned
after divorce. Also, due to the social stigma of divorce, women find it difficult to remarry
and usually attempt to establish an independent household.
While India feels that one has the right to divorce, it is still a highly stigmatizing action. Women are looked down more harshly than men in this regard. There continue to be segments of Indian society that feel divorce is never an option, regardless of how abusive or adulterous the husband may be which adds to the greater disapproval for women. A divorced woman often will return to her family, but may not be whole heartedly welcomed. She is often made to remember that she is a surplus. If she has children, she puts an economic burden on her family and often is given lowly household tasks to perform. Unavoidably, the overall status of the family and household are lowered by having a divorcee living with amongst them. Undoubtedly she becomes the trouble maker of the family, whereas if a man happens to be a divorcee he is wholeheartedly welcomed to the family.

After divorcing his wife, Chacko returns to India and “Mammachi joyfully welcomed him back into her life. She fed him, she sewed for him, she saw to it that there were fresh flowers in his room everyday. Chacko needed his mother’s adoration. Indeed, he demanded it” (248). But the same Chacko shouts at his divorced sister thus: “Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body! My house, my pineapples, my pickle. Pack your things and go” (226). Ammu, who is most unwelcome in her own place is considered as a transgressor. Her father even refuses to believe her complaint against her husband and her husband’s English manager: “Pappachi would not believe her story – not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because, he didn’t believe that an English man, any English man, would covet another man’s wife” (42). That is the fate of the wretched man-less woman. So such treatment drives Ammu to mix with the ‘unmix’ to touch the ‘untouchable’. She begins to “walk out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place” (44).
Ammu’s brother Chacko marries an English woman, Margaret. But since the English woman needs “her own space”, she wants a divorce from Chacko and they are divorced. Chacko, like Ammu, is without a life partner. Roy beautifully portrays the different treatment given to Ammu and Chacko by the family members. Though their mother, Mammachi, knows about Chacko’s libertine relationship with the women in the factory”, she becomes tensed and tight lipped. Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the women “wouldn’t have to go trespassing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it..... The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee clarified things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from feelings” (169).

Simone de Beauvoir observes, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ...” (267). Beauvoir’s observation makes one ask the question: How is it that this world has always belonged to men? Along with Poulian de la Barre, a little known feminist of the seventieth century, many believe that everything that has been written about women by men should be suspect, because men are both the judge and the party to the lawsuit. At all times males have exhibited their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation. Jews in their morning prayers say “Blessed be the God ... that He did not make me a woman,” whereas their wives pray with the spirit of resignation, “Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will.” Even Plato thanked God for he had been created free and not enslaved and also for not being born a woman.
But things are beginning to change and one has to wait and watch whether it will bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women.

The twins, Estha and Rahel, are continuously exposed only to indifferent treatment and cruel words. The world around them has nothing valuable to offer them. They are forsaken, looked down and not at all cared for. These are the negative effects of divorce on the twins. Studies have shown that boys and girls of single parent suffer equally and they just differ in how they suffer. Boys are more externally symptomatic than girls, they act out their anger, frustration and hurt. They may get into trouble in school, fight more with peers and parents. Girls tend to internalize their distress. They may become depressed, develop headaches or stomach aches, and have changes in their eating and sleeping patterns. But it is the other way with Estha and Rahel. Estha becomes very quiet and almost stops talking: “Estha occupied very little space in the world”(11), whereas

Rahel drifted from school to school... she was first blacklisted in Nazereth Convent at the age of eleven, when she was caught outside her housemistress’s garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers ... six moths later she was expelled after repeated complaints from senior girls. She was accused of ... Colliding with her seniors. When ... questioned ... admitted that she had done it to find out whether breasts hurt. In that Christian institution, breasts were not acknowledged.

(16)

Thrice Rahel is expelled from her school and it is because “She didn’t know how to be a girl”(17). Rahel has nobody to give answers to her questions. She has questions about life and “how it ought to be lived” (17). She is totally removed from her classmates and
professors during her college days. She is indifferent “to their passionate critiques” (18). The same indifference and despair break her marriage. Finally, she comes back to Ayemenem on learning that Estha is also back.

The financial reality of divorce causes such disasters in the life of Estha and Rahel. In India, there is a cultural, religions and social stigma associated with divorce. Community disapproval is stronger for divorced women than it is for divorced men. After a divorce, Indian women experience a multitude of problems in the social arena. Because there are very few divorced, separated or single-parent families little social support is available to them. Divorced Indian women encounter greater social barriers to dating and remarriage. Moreover, they are hesitant to make friends with men (either single or married) because the friendliness is often misinterpreted to mean that the woman is frivolous, immoral and sexually permissive. As a matter of fact, a large proportion of divorced women reported problems with sexual harassment in the work place. Most divorced women’s sexual needs are unfulfilled unless she remaries and remarriage for an Indian woman is relatively uncommon. It is, therefore, not surprising that a majority of Indian divorced women experience problems with loneliness.

Roy’s Ammu’s loneliness is filled in by Velutha, her beloved. Ammu, who dares to cross the boundaries, has to face the most hideous form of ostracisation and stands on the fringes of Indian society. If women like Ammu are taken care of, listened to, such transgressions might be avoided. She is forced to live a life in complete conflict with traditional values. Since she is a ‘man-less’ woman, she is subordinated, diminished and outrightly denied a choice of her own. Ammu feels marginalised in her own socio-cultural location. Ammu is victimized as a female, as a divorcee and as a transgressor. The
children Estha and Rahel too are victimized because they are fatherless and their mother ‘man-less’. Had Ammu been educated and economically sound, she would have escaped from the cruel hands of her victimizers. Economical freedom for women is one of the essential things for a decent living.

Labourers as victims of the post colonial era is seen in Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road*. The Oxford dictionary defines labour welfare as “efforts to make life worth living for workmen”. The first industrial undertaking in India was established in 1854. During the following fifteen years, cotton textile, jute and coal industries and railways made considerable progress and employed a sizeable work force. During the first World war, the labour welfare movement got established on a conditional and regular basis. The Second World War proved a boon to the development of Indian industry and of the labour welfare movement. In 1942, the Central Government appointed a Labour Welfare Adviser and a few labour welfare officers in the Department of Labour. The labour welfare acquired a new perspective after Independence. The Indian National Congress had made many commitments to industrial workers. It naturally tried to honour them. Labour Welfare Advisory Boards now function in all states.

One of the major concerns of the state is to protect and safeguard children and women against exploitation and victimization. In all progressive countries the workers have their Trade Unions to look after and safeguard and promote the interests of the workers.

Ammu and her husband are the victims of his English Manager, Mr. Hollick. Ammu’s husband worked as an assistant manager of a tea estate. Mr. Hollick, an English man was the manager of the tea estate. Ammu’s husband was a drunkard. His drinking
habit gets aggravated and he becomes irregular in his job. He stays away from his work, he is summoned to the manager’s bungalow for an enquiry. Since the manager asks for his resignation and Ammu’s husband pleads for mercy. Mr. Hollick, who has an eye on Ammu, ‘uses’ this opportunity to have Ammu at least for a day. Such situations are not rare in big industries. The industrial progress is accompanied by usual inhuman conditions of work and exploitation of women. Such exploitation often thwart the joy and progress of these families involved, as in the case of Ammu’s family. It is something new to Ammu, whereas the English manager is an expert in exploiting girls as well as women: “Already there were a number of ragged, lightskinned children on the estate that Hollick had bequeathed on tea-pickers whom he fancied. This is his first incursion into management circles”(42). So child labour is also evident from these lines. One evil begets another evil. Social evils are all interlinked. Mr. Hollick’s evil advances result in Ammu’s divorce and naturally the mother and the two children are the victims.

In Ammu’s family, there is another victimizer in the name of a ‘self-proclaimed Marxist’:

Chacko was a self-proclaimed Marxist. He would call pretty women who worked in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labour rights and trade union law, flirt with them outrageously. He would call them Comrade, and insist that they call him Comrade back (which made them giggle). Much to their embarrassment and Mammachi’s dismay, be forced them to sit at table with him and drink tea. Once he even took a group of them to attend Trade Union Classes that were held in Alleppey. They went by bus and returned by boat. They came back happy, with glass bangles and flowers in their hair. (65)
Since the girls and women work for their families, they are forced to accept this form of exploitation at least with a sense of resignation. The trade unions are unable to question such atrocities because, “the Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution” (66-7).

Roy talks about the difference in wages in Kerala. The Travancore–Cochin Marxist Labour Union demands,

that paddy-workers, who were made to work in the fields for eleven and a half hours a day—from seven in the morning to six-thirty in the evening—be permitted to take a one-hour lunch bread. That women’s wages be increased from one rupee twenty-five paisa a day, to three rupees, and man’s from two rupees fifty paisa to four rupees fifty paisa a day (71).

The fruits of the so called development of India have not even trickled down to their lives—they do bear the costs of ‘development’ but have been excluded from enjoying its fruits. A Eurocentric, industrial oriented, profit centred development model has become the universal mode of development. This mindset has swept the whole globe denying the rights to survival and self-hood of large sections of the world’s population—women, Dalits and the natives. The experience and labour of women and other oppressed groups particularly dalit women is generally ignored as having no ‘value’, it is counted for nothing unless it can be exploited to the benefit of vested interests. Development has therefore been an elusive dream of large sections of these marginalized groups. At best, they can be viewed as “target groups”, the so called recipients of ‘development’ programmes, planned and implemented by groups with economic and political power.
The Dalit character in Roy’s novel is Velutha, who is a skilled carpenter. He is well used by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma and everything goes well since Velutha accepts whatever they pay him with. But Chacko and Baby Kochamma begin to have fear when they come to know that Velutha has joined in a labour union. They do not want a Dalit to be aware of his basic rights, and do not wish him to become politically powerful. They decide to “keep an eye on him”, and prevent him from starting “this union business in the factory….” (81). It is said in the Manusmriti, “Though a low caste person be able, he should not be allowed to gain economic independence. He should depend economically on the ‘three Varnas’ especially on Brahmins.”

Velutha, a card holding member of the Party, is deceived by his own party leader, K.N.M. Pillai. Though Pillai is aware of what goes on in Paradise Pickles, he is not ready to come out openly against Chacko. However, he is very clear in keeping his private business dealings with Chacko. Towards the end, Velutha is betrayed by the same K.N.M. Pillai. The union leader refuses to help Velutha, for he is a dalit. The follower of Marx is not ready to do away with the caste and thus victimizes a poor man like Velutha. Roy comments on KNM Pillai thus: “It was not entirely his fault that he lived in a society where a man’s death could be more profitable than his life had ever been” (281).

In Meena Alexander’s Nampally Road, one finds that a cycle shop owner employs “thirty apprentices, small, thin boys aged five to twelve. At night they wrapped themselves in rags and slept on the pavement. The peepul tree shielded them from the harsh glare of the street lamp”(19). Child labour, though not completely abolished, is better controlled now, thanks to the compulsory, free education. Schools and syllabi can be more appreciative
and attractive and naturally child labour will be nullified. The noon-meal scheme plays a vital role in helping the poor children enroll in any nearby school.

One finds that taxes are raised for the orange sellers in the same novel. The new tax increase causes a heavy uproar among the people, but the “Ever Ready men leaped off their machines and started beating the orange sellers, dragging them to the pavements, kicking them” (7). The real and regular tax payers of India are ‘rewarded’ with regular tax increase while the swindlers smugglers and great businessmen load their black money in Swiss Bank accounts: “It (Black money) poured into the country secreted underground, it wrecked the economy. No deals could be tied up without it. It ran the world of the rich, it choked the rest of us. To Durgabai it was a kind of poison that was fouling the land” (18).

In postcolonial India, the Anglo-Indian phenomenon was inevitable and rampant in the social scenario. One can find the marginalized position of Anglo-Indians in Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes*. Anglo-Indians are the victims of the Colonizers. The British Colonizers, wherever they went, mixed with the natives and begot children who are half Indians, half Africans and half Australians. These half-breeds, though feel superior to the natives, are not at all accepted by the British people. They receive only secondary treatment and are often snubbed. Ania Loomba in Colonialism / Postcolonialism observes:

Colonizers differed in their modes of interacting with the local populations, thus producing variable racial discourses and identities…. inter-marriages and concubinage blurred racial distinctions and created a population which acted as a strong base for colonial rule… colour and race consciousness marked even the policy of cohabitation and racial distinctions continued
to inform the subsequent ‘mixed’ social order…. However, transgressions did not diminish the effort to maintain the racial purity of whites…. Sexuality is thus a means for the maintenance or erosion of racial difference. (96, 103, 135)

Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture. The Hybrid is the offspring produced by the crossing of two individuals of unlike genetic constitution. There is a distinct dividing line pertaining to hybridity, between colonial literature and post colonial offerings. Colonial constructs of hybridity tended to be largely derogative and ranged from the uncharitable (half-breed) to the down right abusive (mongrel). The colonial version of hybridity promoted the profile of the typical hybrid as being indolent, unproductive and morally degenerate. The post colonial literature on the other hand, freed from the shackles of dominant culture hegemony heralded by the arrival of a host of non-white social commentators of considerable caliber, posited the Hybrid as being a victim of marginalization and the very antithesis of the purity of the hegemonic dominant society.

The plight of the Anglo-Indians is a pitiable one because they are supposed to live in two not merely different but antagonistic cultures. Their mind is a crucible in which two differing and refractory cultures may be said to melt either wholly or in part. The smaller group stays back, aspires to equality as an objective and using the potent tool of assimilation, forms a new social framework.

With the departure of the English colonizers, the identity of the ‘Colonized’ (the other) as postulated by Homi Bhabha (1994), took on the dimension of a challenge to the traditional adversarial roles in the ongoing saga of hybridity. No more was Indian society constituted of the whites (the colonizer) and ‘the other’ (colonized). ‘The Other’
gradually morphed into an avatar of the colonizer. The dominant cultures in any case were itself on a continuous process of hybridity. Caste and communal lines begin to blur, mixed marriages among the dominant. Majority were becoming increasingly common. Marriages between the dominant majority and the marginalized Anglo-Indian minority also begin to occur with increasing regularity. The women of the community, in more and more instances, found themselves marrying ‘Out’. The number of inter-marriages are increasing exponentially in the more liberal progressive and urbanized cities of India. Cheryl Shivan, an Anglo-Indian writer and scholar from Pondicherry, who has herself married ‘out’ is a lone voice in the wilderness, calling for reform in the constitutional definition of the Anglo-Indian being restricted to descent from the male line. Unless serious efforts are made in India to alter the constitutional definition of the Anglo-Indian, the community is doomed to be extinct much sooner than was originally forecast.

Significantly, the above mentioned conditions are well documented in Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes*. Kannan, the only son of Daniel and Lily, meets Helen, the Anglo-Indian girl during his college days:

A girl had just emerged from the train station and was walking down the road towards the line of tea snacks. She was walking fast, her feet seeming to float above the ground, and there was about her an unimaginable lightness. The muscles in the pit of Kannan’s stomach contracted and his throat went dry. The hair she tossed out of her face, the pert nose, the slanting eyes: Kannan thought every detail of her was perfect. (254)

Kannan manages to meet Helen with the help of one of her friends Cynthia, herself an Anglo-Indian and “Things got better after the first meeting” (255). However, Helen does
not care much for Kannan but on her friend, Cynthia’s advice, she let Kannan slowly into her life: If she wanted to get out of the depressing world of the Railway Colony that she was always grumbling about, she told her friend, she should take Kannan a bit more seriously.

Kannan falls deeply in love with Helen and decides to marry her despite his father’s disapproval. To Kannan’s father, Daniel Dorai, it is unimaginable to think of Kannan getting married to a daughter of a retired Anglo-Indian P&T employee, with neither money nor social standing.

Regarding Helen and her friend Cynthia, they never consider themselves as Indians and they feel they are superior to Indians in every way. While conversing with Kannan, Cynthia says, “No, we are not Indians. We hate this country and we want to go home. To England. To Ireland. My grandfather was Irish and Helen’s was a British Sergeant posted here” (266). She goes on to say thus:

She (Helen) would like to be married to a man who has status and money and a position in society. A nice house, a car, a job. You won’t like me saying this, but that is why she encouraged you, because of your father’s money and name. She’s not a bad girl, and it’s not a bad thing to want the thing she wants. (266)

Kannan manages to marry Helen and “The wedding took place in the old Church by the railway station” (278). Kannan’s mother, Lily, is the only person who feels out of place: “No one knew how to enjoy themselves better than the Anglo-Indians and they were determined to do their beautiful Helen proud. Everywhere you looked, there was laughter
and music and gaiety” (279). After three days, she accompanies her husband to the estate where Kannan worked. She is delighted to see the “Morningful bungalow to which Kannan had moved barely a month ago. …It was the size of the house, however, and its profusion of rooms that amazed her…..She fell to dreaming of the parties she would throw in the living room with its comfortable armchairs, … it was all so rich so confident…. She was so happy” (283-4).

Life goes on well, till Helen meets Mrs. Stevenson, who “As the wife of the General Manager of Pulimed Tea Company, and as an English woman, she was superior to any Indian” (299). She wants her house, garden and everything in British style. She cannot accept anything Indian for, “Rare was the English Woman who was truly at home in India beyond the stockade, and Mrs. Stevenson was no exception” (299). She knows how to manage Indians and often remind them of their places. She does not approve of Kannan’s marriage because “Kannan had shaken her composure again, by marrying a mixed blood” (300).

Mrs. Stevenson hosts a dinner for the newly married, Kannan and Helen. Mrs. Stevenson does not even smile at Helen because according to her, Helen is inferior to any ‘pure’ English woman. Helen’s ‘pleased to meet you’ is not considered an English way of greeting. Helen is being snubbed in all possible situations: “How do you do?” said Mrs. Stevenson icily, “Belinda and I were just talking about the way standards are falling everywhere” (312). Mrs. Stevenson talks ill about the Anglo-Indian institutes:

Anywhere else, Helen would have fought back, but here she felt alone, unsure, on the point of breaking down. Mrs. Stevenson knew exactly where she had her victim, and she eased up, just the tiniest bit …. She
wasn’t just showing a beautiful young pretender her place, she was also battling something but dimly sensed a feeling that everything she held dear was about to be swept away. It was bad enough that fools like her husband thought Indians could be their equals, but to think that she had to entertain a mixed blood, when even Indians discriminated against, in her own sitting room . . . (314)

Helen is not made to feel at home. Even while dining, she is not able to follow the English manners. She is incompetent and she can never fall in line with Mrs. Stevenson who is ‘purely’ an English woman:

The butler had created a magnificent tiara of spun de merara sugar for the brown crystal baskets on which the fruit reposed. As she’d (Helen) reached for a pear, Helen had dislodged the sugar cushion. In trying to save it, she had knocked the fruit basket to the floor. Apologies, confusion and the deep burning shame that had suffused her guest’s face—these had been sweet to behold. The spectre of an India damaged beyond repair that the Dorai’s arrival had raised Mrs. Stevenson’s mind receded—for now. (318)

Thus, Helen is not at all recognized as an English woman by people like Mrs. Stevenson. Though the hearts and minds of the Anglo Indians are with England and its cultures, they are rejected by the colonizers themselves and they become victims of marginalization. They are subalterns in the Indian context.

The story of the marginalization of the Anglo-Indian community in India has been a story of exclusion. And this exclusion has been largely self inflicted. The ghettoized minority enclaves like the Railway colonies of old, stand in stark contrast to the variegated
textures of today’s Indian social fabric. There are some marginalized Anglo-Indians in India who follow a doctrine of self-exclusion, not having learnt the lessons of the past. Mr. Charles Dias, Member of Parliament, in a recent address to Members of the Community in Bangalore, appealed to the well-off, land owning Anglo-Indians to donate land, so that an enclave for the settlement of Anglo-Indians in colonies would be established.

If the Anglo-Indian community in India wishes to rid itself of the subaltern label, it needs to rid itself of its meaningless exclusion from the mainstream, adopt assimilation as its mantra, and celebrate its hybridity. Edward Said (1978), the influential and prolific Palestinian writer, calls himself a subaltern, not because he himself was marginalized (which he was decidedly not, being from an elitist Anglophone background), but because he saw himself as the literary flag bearer of arguably the most marginalized people, the Palestinians.

The Anglo-Indian needs to be the flag bearer, marching ahead to rid itself of all subaltern labels. This community is in a uni-dimensional spatial binary; intrinsically subaltern and at the same time excluded from primary membership of the Group. The way ahead for those Anglo-Indians who stayed back, has to be charted and a road map to be drawn up for the mainstreaming of the marginalized by those in the community who have successfully navigated their way of employing the concept of hybrid-vigor – the tendency of cross-breeds to show qualities superior to those of both parents.

The victims of postcolonial India – the poor, divorced women, children, labourors, Anglos – do have a better tomorrow, if only they join hands to voice their anger against their exploiters. Media plays a vital role in exposing social injustices, though some of the channels are party based. But no one can deny media power in a democratic country
where it is a great support to the victims and the marginalized. So there is always hope in all desperate situations.

More and more people should come out of their false decency and decorum to raise their strong voices against victimization and exploitation, just like Anna Hazare. Religion, politics, power structure and every social institution have to be kept clean and this is possible only with people who are willing to change their attitude a little bit for the sake of nation India.