Chapter-V
DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS IN MISTRY’S A FINE BALANCE

Introduction:
Rohinton Mistry as a fiction writer occupies an important place in Indian writing in English. He chooses the time-tested method of conventional storytelling and communicates his point of view effectively. He successfully delineates the intractable complexities of life in India. Mistry has often known for his compassionate realism. He portrays his protagonist with deep sympathy intending to bring their plight before the world.

Many Indian writers from R. K. Narayan to Amitav Ghosh have attempted to present the Dalit consciousness, the atrocities faced in their precariousness and existence but the writings of Rohinton Mistry a twice displaced, Indian migrant in Canada, becomes prominent. As E. M. Forster comments that, Mistry possess the right amount of insight and detachment needed in voicing the Dalits. Living in Bombay for the first 23 years of his life as a Parsi minority, he had experienced the pains and pangs of being marginalize, and after migrating to Canada, he had categorized as the other. It is the double displacement, which makes his novels poignant and successful.

Mistry in the novel fervently attempts to expose the misfortunes, discrimination, oppressions and the endless sufferings of the Dalits in India after Independence. Though many Dalit writers and other reputed literary personalities have focused upon the stark realities of the pitiable existence of Dalits, their problems the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Lack of common language and a homogenous identity prevent the Dalits and underprivileged findings due space in Indian literature. Therefore, Subhendra Mund stresses the exigent need of representing the cause of Dalits in Literature, “I believe, is the want of good literature in an adequate magnitude that can create affirmative responses among the masses to change popular opinion.” (71)
Early Life and Education:
Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi Zoroastrian was born in July 03, 1952 in Mumbai. He did his B.A in Mathematics and Economics from St. Xavier’s college-Autonomous, University of Mumbai. He migrated from Mumbai to Canada in the year 1975, at the age of 23, where he studied at the University of Toronto and did his B. A in English and Philosophy. While he has settled in Canada, he began to write stories, which attracted immediate attention.

Success as an Author:
Mistry won two Hart House Literary Prizes and Canadian Fiction Magazine’s Annual Contributor’s Prize in 1985. He has received many awards to his credit namely, Scotiabark Giller Prize, Oprah’s Book Club, Newstadt International Prize for literature, Governor General’s Award for English-Language fiction and Guggensesheina Fellowship for Creative Arts, US and Canada. He has also nominated for the Man Booker Prize, Man Booker International Prize and International Dublin Literary Award.

Identity as a Parsi Writer:
Mistry belongs to the Parsi community that belongs to the Zorastrian community. Having migrated from Iraq to escape persecution at the hands of the Arab conquerors, they settled in India, in and around Gujrat. They entered India around 1000 years ago. In a way, the community is similar to the Syrian Christian community. Both these religious groups have entered India to preserve their community, religion and their lives. The two communities have their origins in and around west Asia. The similarities do not end here. Parsis have known to be an endogamous group. Conversion and proselytism missions are never encouraged entry into the religion is through birth. Marriage outside the community is severely discouraged. Children born to a Parsi father can adopt his religion but the same case is not applicable to women. The Parsis have recognized as a highly educated and socially advanced community.

Both these communities are fast declining as they are not allowed to intermarry. Both communities were highly favored during the British reign in India. The British who were convinced of their racial superiority found their equals in the Parsi community of India. The Parsis benefited a lot from their association with the British, like education in British established schools.
The Parsis have always aligned themselves to the dominant politics of any particular period. On their arrival in Gujrat 1000 years ago, they sought asylum from the local ruler of the area and accepted the condition imposed by the ruler to adopt Gujrati as their language. The Parsis blended well into the region without any quest for power. During the Muslim rule, the Parsis held Akbar in high esteem. The religion Din-e-illahi created by Akbar and had certain traits resembles the Parsi Zoroastrian religion. The case was the same with the British. When the British ruled India, they schooled themselves to suit the British temperaments. The opportunistic community did it all to save their race, religion and community.

Both communities i.e. the Syrian Christian and Parsis kept themselves out of the dominant politics of the age, yet continued to dominate the economic, social and cultural spaces of India. Christianity came in conflict with the Hindu religion only when it started its proselytizing mission. Otherwise, Christian and Hindu shared a peaceful relationship throughout when it comes to the Syrian Christians the community never encouraged converts and hence was left in peace when the Hindu forces began to dominate politics of India. The Parsis, on the other hand, are politically neutral people and had never come to the conflict with Muslims, Christians or Hindus, for that matter. But given the exclusivity the two communities maintain, the communities have caste-like features that excludes the possibility of any Dalit entering these spaces.

Syrian Christians and Parsis have always kept themselves away from the political happenings in the country. They have been not to invite the ire of the dominant forces and are, for the most part, invisible in the dominant history of India. They have never encouraged conversions in their communities and they strictly refrain from the inter-dining and inter-marriage with other communities. This move had seen as both diplomatic and necessary. The populations of these communities have been dwindling and preserving has been upper-most on their agenda.

Mistry confesses, in the literary journal ‘Rungh’ (1993) that his departure from India was partly encouraged by the expectations of his peers especially those of his generations:

“After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for his/her studies. If possible, one had to find job after finishing a masters or a Ph. D in the States or in England, find a job and settle in the
country. That is how Indian defines success. Therefore, that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some ways decided for me.” (128)

**Indian Diaspora Writer:**
Mistry belongs to the Diasporic group of writers who settled in Canada, after acquiring Canadian citizenship. However, he can be considered as “twice displaced” (Bharucha 14-15), the first displacement was a result of his belongings “to an ethnic group that migrated to India in the thirteenth century AD.” (Gera & Pillai 14) While the second displacement, was a consequence of his choice to migrate to Canada from Mumbai in 1975. His ancestors originally belonged to Iran who migrated from Iran to India at that time. The same is the reason as to why Rohinton Mistry has feeling of twice migration, as his ancestors migrated to India and he migrated from India to Canada.

**Immigrant Experiences:**
As any author of Diaspora Rohinton Mistry’s writing reflects the crisis of self identity and aspects of Immigration. The following lines of an interview Mistry shows the pair of immigrant author.

“Going to Canada, faced with the reality of earning and living and realizing that although I had, up to that point in my life, Read books and listened to music that came from the west, there was a lot more involved in living in the west. I felt very comfortable with the books and the music, but actually, living in the west made that same music seen much less relevant in suddenly brought home to me very clearly the fact that I was imitating something that was not mine, that made no sense in terms of my own life, my own reality. I was a stranger in that culture”, Mistry exclaims! Two galore of awards, the Common Wealth Writers Prize for the Best Book for *Such a Long Journey* in 1991, the Giller Prize, the common wealth writers award, the Los Angeles times Book Award for *A Fine Balance* and the Koriyama Pacific Rim book Prize for fiction the Canadian authors association Mosaic technologies inc. award for fiction, and the regional Common Wealth Writers Prize for the Best Book for *Family Matters*), he has won in the year that followed, did not alter his status as a second class citizen in the new land. The way you look, where you were born, these things are what will determine how you will be treated at certain airports, “the celebrated
Canadian author told audience at Toronto’s international festival of authors.” (Nandini 1)

**Writer of Human Experience:**
The novel, *A Fine Balance* is composed of the sufferings of the underprivileged middle-class to lower-middle class citizens as well as subalterns, the homeless poor, the working class and the rural migrants.

**A Fine Balance:**

   Living in distant Canada, Mistry has haunted by the excruciating experiences of the helpless underdogs who have crushed down by upper class and the denial of the legitimate rights in India. His primary concern in the novel seems to show how Omprakash and Ishvar, two characters in the novel leave their village harassed by the brutal caste system and come to the city to take out their livelihood.

**Layers of Existence and Survival:**
The portrayal of suffering of the trio Ishvar, Omprakash and Dina is a fine example of the caste-class interchange ability so far as oppression and tribulations are concerned. The exposure of the Dalit experience depicted in the novel is present in several layers of existence and survival. The novelist has woven the canvas of the novel with the tension, anguish, hopes and despair of the Dalits who are born to bear on their bent backs the burden of injustice, poverty, torture and starvation. Their minimal efforts for survival by means of their honest labor, is also being thwart by the kulaks in the Indian villages and the government officials in the city. The four main characters Dina Dalal, Parsi widow, Maneck student from a hill station and above all Ishvar and
Omprakash have left their traditional occupation due to caste violence. They are struggling to maintain a fine balance in their lives in a city beside the sea. Ishvar and Om who belong to the untouchable community of Chamars, after many trials and tribulations, which have devoured the father of Om come to the city by the sea in search of employment. Their displacement is symbolic. They have displaced in the caste hierarchy from Chamars to tailors and from native village to unknown and far off civilized city.

**Suffering of the Ordinary Citizen:**
Bhautoo-Dewnarian Nandini narrates an interview of Mistry where he states that the novel started with an image- “a woman at a sewing machine- and was later expanded to include the tailors, to bring in the horror of caste exploitation and violence of rural India, and the figure of Maneck Kohlah from Kashmir. All of these characters, together with Dina Dalal-the fiery—tempered, intelligent, fiercely independent and prematurely aged young woman-constitute the small world of the recreated family of the novel. Each brings in to the web of the novel the horrors, incomprehension and injustice of their backgrounds. Each of these characters becomes representative of the suffering of the ordinary citizen in the India of the 1970s.” (31)

**Marginalized Voice of Dalits:**
The story of the vicissitudes of Dalits begin with Dukhi’s father whose wife thinks that Bhola, a fellow of caste man, is lucky to get light punishment of chopping of his left-hand fingers at the charge of stealing because last year Chhagan lost his hand for the same reason. On finding that there is insufficient food in the house, Dukhi’s mother instead of complaining or dividing already scanty food from her husband or children, tells her husband that it is her fasting day. The code language is developed out of necessity not to frighten the children about the straits at home as well as shows her deep attachment to her children whose welfare is dearer to her than her own life.
A similar instance can be seen in Ishvar’s stealthily putting the large portion of food from his plate to Om’s although he himself does not have sufficient to eat. Whenever Omprakash was away, Ishvar would “scoop some of his own food onto the other leaf”. (FB 03) He does it without making Omprakash aware of it, as to avoid embarrassing him. This gesture of Ishvar depicts his bond with his fellow being and
shows how caring he is for the feelings of his nephew. Ramesh and P. Chavan point out,

“The marginalized voice of Dalits echoes in A Fine Balance through the acts of untouchability imposed on Dalit community. They are having treated as beasts due to their belonging to the lower castes and being the margin. They are marginalized socially, economically and politically and are exploited by upper caste people.” (67-68)

**Social Reality of India:**

*A Fine Balance* is also a text in which Mistry has made a conscious effort to ‘embrace more of the social reality of India’. (Gokhale, October 27, 1996) The Indian constitution adopted in 1950 had declared that all Indians would be equal under the law and no discrimination be made on grounds of caste, creed or gender. The Indian constitution was drafted under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who was a Mahar (an untouchable) and thus belonged to an even lower caste than the Chamars-tailors in Mistry’s narrative.

**Socio-cultural Imbalance:**

The under-privileged of Indian society represented by the likes of Narayan, Dukhi, Roopa and Ishvar are much more humane, discreet and enlightened than the so-called upper caste people of rural India. In the life of these people there is no hypocrisy, duplicity, and arrogance. They are honest sincere, hardworking and outspoken people who are not afraid of calling a spade a spade unlike their upper caste counterparts of the society. The novel is a fine transcript of the socio-cultural imbalance in the Indian society. Samik Basu observes:

“Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* is a study of social relationship in a world buffeted by various cross-currents of circumstances and situations arising out of the declaration of emergency in India in the year 1975 and the feudal setup of the Indian society. Indian society has ridden by caste and class conflicts and caste become obliterated in the equation of exploitation of the weak by the strong. This phenomenon becomes the backdrop of the novel *A Fine Balance* which expresses in ruthless but precise detail how the Dalit life in the Indian society is subjected to all kinds of inhuman torture and oppression, both in the village and the metropolis.” (171)
Untouchability:
Mistry wants to affirm that it is impossible to separate casteism from Indian mind. In this connection Devendra Chaubey remarks, “Needless to say, this untouchability established by birth or caste is such that it is never ending.” (Chaubey 65) Mistry too in *A Fine Balance* relates untouchability with the Hindu “dharmic order.” (FB 101) In the novel, the Brahman Pandits of the village collectively declare:

> There was a proper place for everyone in the world, and as long as each one minded his place, they would endure and emerge unharmed through the darkness of Kaliyug. But if there were transgressions-if the order was polluted-then there was no telling what calamities might befall the universe. (FB 101)

Mistry cleared through his works that immigrant writers are very emotional with their works because in that works he represented his feelings and experience in Canada.

Struggle for Survival:
To put the plight of the Dalits before the people, many Dalits and from upper caste, writers depicted their sorrows and sufferings in their literature. Rohinton Mistry, the promising novelist, takes the cause of the Dalits in his third novel *A Fine Balance* and depicts the evils of the caste system in rural India. He depicts the pitiable condition of his main characters Ishvar and Om along with the minor characters like, Dukhi, Narayan, Rajaram Shankar and Monkey Man. The tragic tale of Ishvar and Omprakash’s lives hold the reader up to the last page of the novel and brings tears to his eyes in the end. Their struggle for survival in the hostile and cruel world goes in vain and they end as beggars on the roads of the city by the sea. Their struggle to maintain the balance between hope and despair fails at last and they lose themselves in the darkness of despair.

Atrocities on Dalits:
It is the study of human relationships in a world permitted by cruelty and abused power. The novel is realistic picture of the atrocities committed on two Dalits from village and the plight of the poor characters from the Dalit community. Mistry portrays how untouchability reduces the people of the lower castes to mere beasts.
They have no identity of their own and are the ostracized section to society. Even their touch to high caste people brings a volley of abuses. To quotes from the novel:

*A Fine Balance* ironically renders how the marginalized and the powerless are forced to maintain a precarious ‘fine balance between life and death-in-life existence while passing through the impossible ordeals of life.’ (FB 11)

**Women’s Harassment through Religion:**

Like Anand’s portrayal of Sohini’s harassment by the priest in *Untouchable*, Mistry also presents the picture of harassment by the priest. Mistry’s priest Dustoor Framji known as Dustoor Daab-Chaab among his colleagues has known for his propensity to exploit young women who come on his way. To quotes from the novel:

“His reputation for squeezing and fondling had earned him the title of Dastoor Daab-Chaab …..his refusal to disguise his embraces with fatherly or spiritual concern. They feared that one day would go too far, drool over his victim or something, and disgrace the fire temple.” (FB 19-20)

Women are sexually harassed even at the places of justice when Dina approaches the court gate a group of lawyers surround her to demand charges. They show their degree and advise her to be careful in choosing the lawyer. Some of them make indecent advances:

In the crush, a hand squeezed her bottom, while another passed neatly over the breasts. “You rogues! You shameless rascals!” she struck out with her elbows, and managed to kick a shin or two before they scattered. She wished she had her pagoda parasol with her what a lesson she would teach them. (FB 560)

The writer has palpably verbalized the untold misery of the Dalits exploited by the empowered social forces. The suppression of the Dalits in the name of religion is inhuman and bestial. Mistry’s main thrust is for a national and global change and to usher in a new realm of impartial and healthy human relationship in the world community where love and peace will reign forever.

**Poison of Untouchability:**

Out of his determination to get away from the village, Dukhi goes to city to work as a pavement cobbler and meets Ashraf, his Muslim friend with whom he attends a meeting of a Congress leader, which presents the Gandhian ideals for the removal of untouchability. This disease 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 Gandhiji says that, “untouchability
poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk.” (FB 107) The lofty Ideas of the
speech have undercut by the ironical remarks of Ashraf on the seemingly innocuous
query of Dukhi that would the zamindars of our village clap for a speech about the
removal of the caste system. ‘They would clap, and go on in the same old way’. (FB 108)

Power has always exercised as a strategy and hence it is like a perpetual battle
to retain it. Hence, those in the higher echelons of power ensure that their domination
has never questioned or challenged. Transgressions had frowned upon and even
severely punished:

….the village saw a sharp increase in the number of floggings meted out to
members of the untouchable castes, as the Thakurs and Pandits tried to whip
the world into shape. The crimes were varied and imaginative: a Bhangi ahd
dared to let his unclean eyes meet Brahmin eyes; a Chamar had walked on the
wrong side of the temple road and defiled it; another had strayed near a puja
that was in progress and had allowed his undeserving ears to hear the sacred
shlokas; a Bhungi child not erased her footprints cleanly from a Thakur’s
courtyard. (FB 101)

**Traumatization:**

In the novel, *A Fine Balance* the upper castes, comprising Brahmins and Rajputs
never tries to know the Mochis. So they exploit them and finally kill them. The
inequities committed by the upper castes will be brought out in the course of the
exploitation. The ground reality has not changed still now, the dailies, T.V. channels
daily expose us to news of the Dalits being hounded, tortured, killed and burnt. Their
women are gang raped the news was of the same type that Dukhi heard evening after
evening during his childhood, only the names were different. Now Dukhi Mochi’s
suffering can be understand in terms of psychosocial traumatization. He grew up
listening to the stories of suffering of his own father. While telling the suffering of his
community by his father he grew up listening to the stories of how the young girls of
the community had raped and killed and how they disappeared and had never heard
of. Finally, when he entered the profession as an apprentice of his father later on his

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own traumatized as he was, he adjusted to the ways of dominant class of Thakurs in particular:

“Like the filth of dead animals which covered him and his father as they worked, the ethos of the caste system was smeared everywhere. And if that was not enough, the talk of adults, the conversation between his mother and father filled the gaps in his knowledge of the world.” (FB 96)

Wringing of Untouchbles for Free Labour:
A large segment of Indian population has segregated and discriminated against merely for being born in the so-called lowly castes. There is no rationale behind it. After all, one’s birth is not within one’s control and moreover placing a job beneath another is an old approach. All professions have treated as dignified in the West. The life of Chamar’s depicted by Mistry in the novel shocks the reader. Without proper shelter, food and clothes, the basic needs of human being, the chamars live totally on the mercy of upper castes. Mistry narrates:

They had to wait until a cow or buffalo died a natural death in the village. Then the chamars would be summoned to remove the carcass sometimes the carcass was given free, sometimes they had to pay, depending on whether or not the animals upper-caste owner had been able to extract enough free labour from the chamars during the year. (FB 95)

Social and Cultural Consciousness:
The novel reflects a total view of socio-cultural implications of contemporary society. The author has attempted to bridge the gap between different social and cultural consciousness. Ishvar and Om belong to the Chamar caste means Dalit. The narrative is a documentary on Dalits ways of life. Trivial details like how they skin the carcass, eat meat and tan the hide are dealt with great interest and touching subtly. For instance, “And as he mastered the skills, imperceptibly but relentlessly Dukhi’s own skin became impregnated with the odour that was part of his father’s smell.” (FB 95) The novel highlights the specific rural phenomenon of frustration and exploitation.

Changing Ancestral Profession:
To leave one’s ancestral profession by low caste creates a blasphemy, when Dukhi decides the vocation of his sons. This decision to make his sons tailors instead of
cobblers is the courageous step taken by Dukhi. Om and Ishvar attempt to leave the iron straps of their caste vocation and become tailors in the city. The desire to change the humiliating identity as ‘Chamars literally meaning skin-tanners’ and assuming a new identity of tailors present their own history not depending on traditions and customs. The change of profession thus becomes an attempt to subvert the existing social conventions and rejection of mass identity inculcated and imposed on them by the existing social order.

**Politics as a Backdrop of Exploitation:**

Mistry has narrated and re-narrated several stories of India’s history, culture and caste based society. He also throws light on Dalit’s ways of life and the conflict between the untouchable and the caste people in rural India. He shows how the political character like Thakur Dharamsi is a symbol of tyranny, exploitation and injustice. People like him flourished a lot at the time of the Emergency. Ratna Sheila Mani observes:

“The upper caste leaders connive with the bureaucracy to preserve their interests during the Emergency. Thakur Dharamsi achieves respectability as a political leader because he organizes many sterilization camps. His cruel misuse of power indicates the beginning of the trend of criminalization of politics and politicization of crime. Naturally, the novel raises many questions of political correctness, as it shows that forces of privilege combine to suppress the lower castes, the rural and the urban poor for self-gain.” (195)

**Irony of Justice:**

Irony plays a dominant role in this novel when it becomes a potent weapon in the hands of the exploited when he not able to express his true feelings due to his situation in a particular context. The irony of the situation where Dalits are supposed to get justice from the hands of hand-boiled conservatives like Pandit Lalluram becomes apparent when Dukhi goes to the revered pandit to seek justice at the inhuman beating of Ishvar and Narayan by the village schoolmaster. The whole episode presenting Pandit Lalluram as an arbiter of justice and an apostle of knowledge has saturated with sarcasm. The writer is at his satiric best when he describes Pandit Lalluram as a guardian of caste hegemony and his condescending attitude. ‘He is a chit pavan Brahmin-descended from the purest among pure, from the
keepers of the sacred knowledge.’ (FB 111) He is well known as a dispenser of justice and ‘everyone always went away satisfied: the victim obtained the illusion of justice; the wrongdoer was free to continue in his old ways; and Pandit Lalluram, for his trouble, received gifts of cloth, grain, fruit and sweets from both sides.’ (FB111)

Sanctity of Caste:
Pandit Lalluram’s monologue on the sanctity of caste makes Dukhi renounce any hope he might have nurtured about justice and he takes his leave with ironical words forcefully convey his merits but on the accidents of birth and where conventions, however faulty and irrational, become the sole cause of existence. ‘I understand completely Panditji, thank you for explaining to me. I am so lucky-you, a Chit-Pavan Brahmin, wasting precious time on an ignorant Chamar like me.’ (FB 114) The point is that Pandit Lalluram was not busy in something important except in belching after a hearty meal. The full import of the words uttered by Dukhi has not taken in by Pandit Lalluram, though there remains a doubt in his mind ‘whether he had been flattered or insulted’. (FB 114)

Dukhi Mochi’s wife Roopa stands for docility and tolerance. Her shameful exploitation by the Watchman of the rich man’s orchard is Rohinton Mistry’s harsh comment on the double standards prevailing in the contemporary Indian society in the form of untouchability.

Impoverished Untouchables:
Mistry dwells on untouchability in A Fine Balance, which reduces the people who belong to lower castes. The untouchables reach their outcaste status of people not to be touched. They have economically exploited to the core i.e. totally impoverished; besides, they have to reckon with illiteracy. Their loss of identity crisis percolates to the future generation too. As a result, for generations, they have to grapple with identity politics. They simply become faceless. They do not live like other human beings but simply exist and remain exploited like animals. They have to endure the atrocities of the so-called high people and their future is bleak. P. Selvam states that:

“It’s after independence, the constitution of India incorporated several laws to abolish untouchability by imposing severe punishment. But all these efforts still have not achieved their success completely as observed by Rohinton Mistry in A Fine Balance.” (59)
Ill Treatment and Use of Abusive Language:

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry highlights crucial events in the country’s chronicle by depicting the background of each protagonist. The lives of the tailors’ Forefathers reflect the tyranny of the caste system in rural India where unimaginable horrors have perpetuated on Dalits. Dukhi, like others of his ilk, depended on the landowning class called Thakurs. He would attend to the Thakur’s myriad chores and would accept whatever was paid to him. Once while he was crushing dried chillies on the orders of Thakur Premji, the mortar broke into two with one part landing on his foot and injuring it. Unmindful of Dukhi’s injury, the Thakur beat him up severely with a stick. Naturally, this left Dukhi very sad and angry. This illustration from the text is enough evidence for this:

The Thakur’s wife was watching from the kitchen window, Oiee, my husband! Come quick! She screamed. “The Chamar donkey has destroyed our mortar”. What have you done, you witless animal! Is this what I hired you for?” I swear on the heads of my children”, begged Dukhi, “I was only pounding chillies, as I have done all day. Look Thakurji, the sack is almost empty, the work—”. Get up! Leave my land at once! I never want to see you again!..” But, Thakurji, the work—”. He hit Dukhi across the back with his stick. “Get up, I said! And get Out!...Thakurji, have pity, there has been no work for days, I don’t—”...Listen, you stinking dog! You have destroyed my property, yet I am letting you off! If I wasn’t such a soft hearted fool, I would hand you to the police for your crime. Now get out! (FB 104-105)

Dukhi Mochi, born to the parents of a tanner family carries the stamp of shame even from birth. There is class and communal discrimination because of birth and profession. Dukhi has treated slightly better than an animal but not certainly as a human being who has his own dignity, value, and individual identity. And also indigenous, robs the dignity of Dukhi Mochi. Smarting under humiliation Dukhi Mochi decides to change his profession. Dukhi’s experience at Thakur Premji’s house where he is cheated out of his payment after the accident of breaking the mortar stone briefly show him how just the system was. Without caring for his bleeding foot, the Thakur abuses and kicks him out of his house. Dukhi’s outburst before his wife presents his suppressed anger at the injustice:

“On top of that, my foot is crushed, he said. ‘I could kill that Thakur Nothing but a lowly thief. And they are all like that. They treat us like animals. Always
have, from the days of our Forefathers’. ‘I spit in their upper caste faces. I don’t need their miserable jobs from now on.” (FB 105)
The dastardly and heinous beatings and all treatment of Thakurji are inhuman are portrayed in the above lines. Dukhi Mochi does not get angry; he only feels humiliated when he has beaten for the straying goats. He falls asleep and he himself admits that it is his fault. Though he has worked all day, he has thrashed and cheated of his payment. Further, his foot has crushed in this accident. This incident festers within Dukhi and his rage against the higher caste people gathers intensity.

**Changing Profession:**
Inhuman events were quite frequent. Dukhi decided to change his profession and take up one, which was dignified and paying. He migrated to the nearby city and became a cobbler. There he met a Muslim tailor Ashraf with whom he became friendly. He apprenticed his children to him so that they became tailors and did not suffer the ignominy attached to the profession of Chamars. This was an individual decision but it was something not to the liking of the landowning class because that would make the lowly caste people independent.

In the olden days, punishment for stepping outside one’s caste would have been death. Dukhi was spared his life, but it became a very hard life. He was allowed no more carcasses, and had to travel long distances to find work. Sometimes he obtained hide secretly from fellow chamars, it would have been difficult for them if they were found out. The items he fashioned from the illicit leather had to be sold in far off places where they had not heard about him and his sons. (FB 118-119)

Though this kind of punishment should condemned as being extreme and inhuman, it is considered essential because one way of exercising power is to keep people in a state of shock and disbelief. To Thakur Dharamsi, there can be no questioning of this because:

“What the ages had put together, Dukhi had dared to break asunder; he had turned cobblers into tailors, distorting society’s timeless balance. Crossing the line of caste had to be punished with the utmost severity, said the Thakur.” (FB 147)
Severe Punishment:
Ishvar’s father Dukhi violates caste rules by making his sons tailors. This shows surprising courage in a man who has socialized into accepting his position in the caste hierarchy without any murmur. During the younger days of Dukhi, he becomes familiar with a long list of the real and imaginary crimes a Dalit person could commit, and corresponding punishments. They remained engraved in his memory. He learns what it means to be a Dalit in a village community and never wants the same to happen to his progenitors. He has seen Bhola, Dosu, Gambhir, Dayeram, Sita, Dhiraj, Bhungi, and others suffering at the hands of Zamindars. Even his wife Roopa, is raped by Zamindar’s gardener.

The upper caste people punish the Dalit people severely, which is inhuman for the minor crimes they commit either knowingly or unknowingly. The punishment meted out by them is disproportionate to the crime. By the time Dukhi enters his teens, he becomes aware of the divides of the people eternally. To survive in the village like his ancestors, with humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions he stops dreaming of crossing this communal fault line. This is a particularly moving section of the novel bringing to life the sordid living conditions of the Dalits living in rural India.

“No, it is Bhola’s turn. But where he was working, they accused him of stealing…they chopped off his left-hand fingers today’. ‘Bhola is lucky’, said Dukhi’s mother, ‘Last year Chhagan lost his hand at the wrist. Same reason”…Dosu got a whipping for getting too close to the well.” (FB 96)

Atrocities on Women:
The poverty-stricken women who just live on the husk thrown out by their overloads, they themselves and their children from hunger pinch became vulnerable to sexual abuses. They are easily frightened with warnings and punishments by the upper class thugs who exploit the ignorance and innocence quite shamelessly.

Mistry’s consciousness about Dalits make copious notes of the atrocities let loose on the downtrodden by the mighty Landlords belonging to the upper caste. It is true that the caste menace has created a big schism in the society. Despite the laws and land reforms, the poor continue to suffer for minor offences. The plight of women is particularly dismal. Dukhi’s wife Roopa was raped repeatedly by the Landlord’s chowkidar because she was caught stealing some fruits for her children from the
Landlord’s orchard. Another villager Budhu’s wife “refused to go to the field with the zamindar’s son, so they shaved her head and walked her naked through the square.” (FB 97) A true consciousness about Dalits that Mistry opposes exploitation of all types.

Bhautoo-Dewnarian Nandini observes:

A discussion of the narrative’s sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, the ‘subalterns’ in this novel would be incomplete without considering the many other social worlds that temporarily flit across its tapestry. They are, for the most part introduced through the tailors. In their jhopadpatty existence, they encounter families who live through their misfortunes and tragedies. In the construction plant where they are forcefully, held for many months, they discover the exploitation of workers. Their homeless existence is a temporary phase but for those that they meet, it is a permanent state of existence. Finally, through Shankar and Beggarmaster, we are introduced to a world of subalterns who are worse off than the tailors-the beggars.” (35)

Displacement and Tortures:

Dukhi, thus, decides to send Narayan and Ishvar as apprentices of Ashraf’s tailor shop in a nearby town and masters a new vocation. The boys have overwhelmed by the sea change in their life style after joining Muzzafar tailoring company. They live and learn with Ashraf chacha for years. Thus, they turn from cobblers to tailors. Dukhi utters: “If someone asks your name, don’t say Ishvar Mochi or Narayan Mochi. From now you are Ishvar Darji and Narayan Darji”. (FB 115) Ishvar and Narayan return to their village to set up business. Unfortunately, it does not take long to realize that their misfortunes tend to follow them even though they migrated to another place. Om and Ishvar have forced to work in a labor camp along with other beggars, drunks and mentally disturbed individuals. One of the drunks talks back:

‘Rabid dogs!’ he shouted. Born of diseased whores! The constables stopped laughing and set on him their sticks; when he fell, they used their feet.’

‘Stop, please stop!’ beseeched the facilitator. ‘How will he work if you if you break his bones? ‘[…]’ ‘There are not hidden injuries!’ the Facilitator protested to Sergeant Kesar ‘Look at all that blood!’ (FB 324)

The passage evokes torture, brutalities and beatings. The tailors, Ishvar and Omprakash have identified as beggars. Although they are living from away from their
native village, they have still denied their rights and their space. Ms. P. Navammal and Mr. S. M. Rajasagar point out that, “In *A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry gives a heart rendering version of man’s barbaric inhumanity to man and also the unimaginable deprivation and inequalities experienced by the downtrodden and oppressed in India.” (33)

**Attempts of Protest:**

Dalits have tried to express their assertion of their equality and their dignity as a human being. The conversation among Dalits when they have to carry half-dead buffalo from the fields of Thakur Premji to skin, it demonstrates their anger at an unjust social order, ‘They resumed the task, sweating and grunting, while Chhotu cursed the Thakur softly, ‘Bastard hypocrite.’ (FB 102) Similarly, the conversation which ensues between Dukhi and his fellow Dalits sitting near the river when Dukhi comes out of the Brahmin colony forcefully testifies the view though exploited and uneducated, they are not ignorant of the tactics employed by upper castes to subjugate them. Their language, which is full of references to bodily parts and invectives depict the effect of a life; lived on the margins of the society. Their frustration is being deprived of their rightful share comes out in their inversion of everything held sacred by the dominant castes. Dukhi with indignation calls Pandit Lalluram, ‘Goo-Khavan Brahmin’ (FB 114) parodying his high sounding name, ‘Chit-Pavan Brahmin’. On Dukhi’s producing the supposed ointment, which Pandit Lalluram in an obvious show of charity has given to Dukhi, they find it to be the boot-polish, and the ribald humour at the cost of the wily Lalluram becomes an expression of their holed up resentment against at prevalent mistreatment by the upper castes:

> Looks like boot polish to me, ‘said Chhotu. ‘He must apply it to his head every morning. That’s why it shines like the sun.’ Aray bhaiya, you are confusing his head with his arse-hole. That’s where he applies the polish—that’s where the sun shines from, according to his caste brothers. That’s why the shit-eaters all try to lick their way into it. (FB 114)

**Consequences of Protest:**

Dukhi knew well what it meant to raise voice against the mighty upper caste Landlords. There were examples of Bhola, Gambhir, Dayaram; Sita. Bhola had accused of stealing, so the fingers of his left hand had chopped off. He had considered
lucky because the previous year, Chhagan lost his hand at the wrist and Dosu got whipping for getting too close to the village well meant for the upper caste people.

**Role of Dalit Literature:**

Om and Ishvar can also be seen as representing the two approaches to resistance. Ishvar never responds violently to discrimination and bears his lot with calm acceptance though he is at all time aware of the injustice around him. Jyoti Yadav asserts that:

> “Caste hegemony is one of the most cherished aims of Dalit literature by exposing the foibles and prejudices of castes society towards Dalits and instilling in them a consciousness of their worth by bringing to their notice their virtues which the society had hitherto neglected.” (Yadav 185)

Sharan Kumar Limbale’s statement in this regard is quite notably describes how Dalit literature is instrumental in identity formation and an assertion of Dalits resistance. One of the aim of Dalit literature, according to him is to, “familiarize Dalits with their past, explain to them that they are enslaved, to show them that they are human beings and it is their duty to right to fight for the rights of human beings.” (Burke 185)

**National Politics of Emergency:**

Writing with Dalit consciousness, Mistry portrays the untellable and untold miseries of their ensuing from the caste discrimination, poverty, hunger, widened material inequalities, unemployment, humiliation and human atrocities. The oppression and exploitation of Dalit are rooted in local traditions, culture and language. The system is coercive. Despite the educational and economic ample opportunities availed, the social inequality largely prevails. The saga of Ishvar and Omprakash’s life becomes more pathetic during the internal emergency imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975. The emergency saw the suspension of the basic fundamental rights guaranteed to every Indian citizen by the constitution of India. However, it is the emergency, represented most realistically in the novel since the fusion between the general and the personal has seen here at its best. Ishvar and Om manage to find a shack in the Jhopadpatti, which incidentally has most vividly portrayed by Mistry, something so far not seen in the Indian novel in English.

The first discussion begins when Ishvar asks, ‘Dinabai, what is this Emergency we hear about? Government problems-games played by people in power.
It doesn’t affect ordinary people like us.’ (FB 75) This creates a plain understanding of how the lower classes, the Dalits were alienated from the working of the democracy and did not really associate themselves with the various instruments that the Government used. The poor rather wanted to stay away from it, hoped and believed that they would remain unharmed. ‘Sounds like one more Government tamasha…No consideration for people like us.’ (FB 05) though the Chamars whose discourses are partially and superficially covered in historical texts.

But the irony is that Emergency intrudes only into the lives of ordinary people. Emergency has an overpowering presence in the novel. It had studded with forced sterilization, city embellishment programs, media censorship as well as imprisonment of anyone through MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) A Fine Balance concentrates on the terror and trauma that the ordinary Common Man experienced.

All the four important characters of the novel suffer a lot during the emergency. In the opinion of O. P. Mathur:

The lives of all the major characters of the novel are blighted by the Emergency. It leaves Maneck Kohlah crushed under the wheels of a fast suburban train with Avinash’s chess set in his hands; Dina Dalal, prematurely old and purblind, slaves her years out in the house of her brother. And the two tailors struggling only for a livelihood are utterly crushed. Ishvar, with trumps in place of legs, is driven by his young but castrated nephew Omprakash, a big full-stop having so bluntly converted their heroic struggle for a living into a begging on the streets for small charities, drained of all hope till death comes mercifully to release them from this burden called life. (70)

The adverse effect of Emergency has experienced by Ishvar and Om who fell prey to almost all the aspects of Emergency and reduced to beggary. During the Emergency, in the name of beautification people were left, immobile and rootless. The slogan, “THE NATION IS ON THE MOVE” (FB 303) seemed quite ironical because instead of advancement and prosperity all the characters experienced destruction and identity crises. The process of beautification introduced slum clearance and sterilization. People had forcefully evicted from the hamlets they lived in and moved to work camps where the living conditions were almost unbearable and deplorable.

One of the many horrendous atrocities unleashed during the Emergency was in the name of beautification of cities. Entire slums had demolished and reduced to
rubble in areas like Tukaram Gate. Mistry describes how Om and Ishvar learn from Rajaram that the hutment dwellers had tricked into leaving their huts and then:

“But once the colony was empty, the big machines went it. Most of the bulldozers were old jeeps and trucks, with steel plates and short wooden beams like battering rams affixed into the structures of plywood, corrugated metal and plastic…People were crushed. Blood was everywhere. The new law says the city must be made beautiful.” (FB 295)

**Deep Rooted Caste System:**

Ishvar and Om had quite forcefully taken to one such work camp where they have forced to undergo sterilization. In the aftermath, Ishvar develops infection and one of his legs has 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 has 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 of and Emergency of the Dalit consciousness in the Indian politics. Despite the new laws regarding untouchability, exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes continues 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 that it is too difficult to fight against the deep-rooted caste system in India.

Casteism like corruption is rooted in the core of India’s depraved value system, which is ultimately defiling the system. In independent country, in a modern era, in 21st century where technology has so far advanced, which one could not have imagined five years back, for this advancement Indians are in the race of third world countries. And imagining for the developed country one feels happy that lots of progress has been made this rosy picture horrifying truth is still prevalent in our country casteism. The great leaders did at their level best to uproot the caste system.

Despite all the hues and cry in the Indian political system about Federalism and democracy, the lower middle-class and the economic domination, left them victims of the oppression and neglect. To the Dalits, “living each day is to face Emergency or another.” (FB 571) The economically upper class people did not understand the sufferings of the poor. To them the Prime Minister was a “visionary leader” and the Emergency “A true spirit of Renaissance.” (FB 371)
The novel presents an authentic portrait of contemporary India during the Emergency era imposed by Indira Gandhi. It is India with its timeless chain of caste exploitation; male chauvinism, linguistic strives and communal puppeteer. Mistry has portrayed the humiliating condition of people living in Jhopadpattis, deaths on railway tracks, demolition of shacks on the pretext of beautification, violence on the campuses in the name of ragging, deaths in the police custody, lathi charges and murders in the pretext of enforcing family planning, which are part of India’s nasty politics.

Om and Ishvar became utterly helpless and unaided as their shelters have bulldozed, and have evicted from their scanty existence in the name of city beautification. They lament on the disappearance of their houses and emerging laws:

“But how can they destroy our homes, just like that? They said it’s a new emergency law…New law says the city must be made beautiful. ‘Heartless animals! For the poor there is no justice, ever! We had next to nothing, now it’s less than nothing! What is our crime? Where are we to go?” (FB 295)

The novel reflects the reality of India, the politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, suppression, violence and bloodshed. It also provides an intimate insight into rural India focusing on the injustice, the cruelty and the horror of deprivation and exposes the trauma of India’s millions along communal, religious and linguistic lives.

During the emergency, ‘beautification’ of public amenities displaces “purity” as the desired ideal, which operates much as caste purity does in order to identify an expendable class. Mistry installs in his fiction the state of Emergency under whose auspices all kinds of state and bureaucratic power spin into excess. The emergency also provides the visible mantle under which traditional forms of power reiterate their hold upon village societies, for instance using its population policies to take away the reproductive capacities of Dalits.

**Politics of Beautification:**

In the city, under the emergency, the stigma of defilement gets a new interpretation as its urban beautification programs attempt to eliminate from view beggars and pavement dwellers. These are the new equivalents of the Dalits and many of them may indeed, like. Mistry’s characters, Ishvar and Omprakash, come from the Dalit castes. In this mutation of the terms of oppressive, the only thing that changes is the language of discrimination, not the fact of discrimination, its logic or its targets. In a powerful retrospective sequence that culminates in 1969, Mistry traces the process
leading up to the eventual displacement of Ishvar and Omprakash from their native village by the river. Narayan, Ishvar’s brother and Omprakash’s father has challenged the corrupt electoral practices that effecting disenfranchises the Dalit caste. For this, he and his friends have tortured to death by the local leader Thakur Dharamsi. Not satisfied with this, the Thakur ordered the torching of Narayan’s home and the murder of his family in a bid to root out the aspiration of Dalits for democratic equality. Thakur spits the venom against the Dalits, “I want those achoot jatis to learn a lesson. I want it to be like the old days. When there was respect and discipline and order in our society.” (FB 146)

No Justice for the Poor and Downtrodden:
The novelist painfully observes that nothing has changed for the Dalits even in the post-independence India. Their situation has become like ‘from the frying pan to fire’. There were no words for such a loss and for an injustice so immense. The best they could do was ‘shedding tears’ in the democratic nation. Accused are rewarded and innocence are punished here is lack of poetic justice. Dina Dalal commented on the system ‘justice is sold to the highest bidder.” (FB 432)

Sterilization and Castration:
During the Emergency, the Family Planning Program has used to eliminate the enemies of the establishment. It is clear from the way Om is first sterilized and then called again at the behest of Dharamsi, only to be castrated under the pretext of “a free operation to save his life” which is not only pathetic but inhuman and unbecoming of a doctor as Om is a bachelor and his marriage is about to be solemnized. His uncle Ishvar’s entreaties to the authorities to spare Om remained unheeded. As a result, both Ishvar and Om become cripples and turn to begging only to fall into the nightmare anonymity of the city—a ‘world of sudden police swoops, forced labour, goonda gangs, protection money, casual street murders’. The hospitals follow standing orders to put down the cause of any death at the market square by severe beating at the hands of the police has described as accidental. The new rules of Emergency make it obligatory for every officer to encourage people to get sterilized to complete his quota otherwise, there will be no promotion. Thus, Family Planning Program has passed into service to eliminate one’s enemies by confusing sterilization with castration.
Mistry’s novel testifies to historic incidents of oppression. He also lets his characters talk back against the oppression. “Actually, we tailors take more pride in our work. We show more considerations for fabric than these monsters show for humans. It is our nation’s shame.” (FB 524) Dalits are worth nothing compared to material goods in the Indian society. Mistry tries to show how human have deprived of their human rights within a dictatorial society. He also shows the frustration and shame of a whole nation. Ravind Grewal states of the events in the novel:

“The trucks take them, along with scores of others, to a sterilization camp. Here everyone is unloaded the regardless of age or sex, is sterilized. Abuses are rampant: the operation has carried out on a sixteen-year-old boy while his father’s tearful pleas for mercy have ignored, a man has vasectomized over his protestations that he has already had the procedure, an elderly woman is tubecostomised despite the fact that she is obviously well past child-bearing age.” (26)

Victims of Political System:
The Dalits are trying to negotiate their survival in a system where lives and bodies of human beings are been auctioned for sterilization. This dialogue between Om and Ashraf explains the auctioning of patients sterilized at the clinic:

Yes definitely. But tell me, how much money can he make from that place? The operation bonus is not very big.” “Ah, but it’s not his only source. When the patients are brought to the clinic, he auctions them.” “What does that mean?” “You see government employees have to produce two or three cases for sterilization. If they don’t fill their quota, their salary is held back for that month by the government. So the Thakur invites all the schoolteachers, block development officers, tax collectors, food inspectors to the clinic. Anyone who wants to can bid on the villagers. Whoever offers the most gets the cases registered in his quota (FB 521)

The employees working for the state and performing the operation are also slaves in their own country. They have forced to obey certain rules and regulations if they do not want to lose their job and starve to death. They have forced to perform sterilization wit unclean instruments under poor economic conditions, putting the life of the victims at stake. Mistry wants the world to be aware of the exclusion of these people and the injustice they have to go through in their own country. The Dalit
characters have objectified. They have given the same treatment as female characters have similarly reduced to objects. They have victimized by communal oppression. The narrator writes,

“In the villages, they say they will dig wells only if so many sterilizations are done. They tell farmers they will get fertilizer only after nusbandhi has performed. Living each day is to face one emergency or another.” (FB 571)

**Dictatorship of the Landlords:**

Ashraf tells Ishvar and Om that Thakur Dharamsi has become congress party official and very powerful too. His influence has increased from the village to the town. Moreover, it is a rumour that he will become minister in the next election. He achieves respectability as a political leader during emergency because he organizes many sterilization camps. While roaming on the street three of them suddenly encounter Thakur Dharamsi in front of family planning centre. Om boldly goes towards Thakur, as if he is going to hit him. Ishvar tries to pull him back and Om’s defiance turns into humiliation as the smooth leather soles of Om’s sandals slips. Om spits in front of Thakur. Thakur, replies, “I know who you are!” (FB 523) On the next day Ashraf, Ishvar and Om have rounded up along with others and forcibly taken to a sterilization camp. Ashraf has left behind bleeding. In the sterilization camp, there is complete chaos. All people, old, middle aged and young of sixteen and seventeen have taken for operation. Om also has taken for operation. Ishvar’s pleading to police, doctors and official’s turns to be useless.

“Doctorji, you are like mother-father to us poor people, your good work keeps us healthy. And I also think nusbandhi is very important for the country. I am never going to marry, Doctorji, but please leave out my nephew, Doctorji his name is Omprakash and his wedding is happening soon, please listen to me, doctorji, I beg of you!” (FB 534)

However, the doctors go ahead. They perform operation on both Ishvar and Om. Ishvar’s dreams shatters suddenly. Everything is ruined. The comment of a fellow patient is very true. “What to do, bhai, when educated people are behaving like savages. How do you talk to them? When the ones in power have lost their reason, there is no hope.” (FB 535) Ishvar finds some relief in the idea of reversing the nusbandhi. He still hopes that they shall reverse the nusbandhi, and will return next year for wedding.
Misuse of Political Power:
Thakur Dharamsi arrives at the darkness. The doctors, Policemen and family planning workers, all rush to greet him. Thakur stroll through the recovery tent. When he sees Om, he gives orders to remove his testicles. However, initially doctor hesitate and refuse to do so, Thakur threatens him. Om has once again taken to Operation Theatre and his testicles have removed. Ishvar cries loudly, “Hai Ram! Look! Look what they have done! To my nephew! Look! They have made a eunuch out of him!” (FB 537) Thakur uses his superior position to see that Omprakash has castrated. Thakur Dharamsi’s cruel misuse of authority shows that the politicization of crime, so rampant in India in the last decade of the twentieth century, started in the period of internal emergency.

Silenced by the System:
Ishvar and Om’s misery becomes worse by the news of Ashraf’s chacha’s death. Ishvar takes Om to family planning centre once again. The police refuse to lodge a complaint. Ishvar tries to convince the officer that his nephew has made eunuch. The officer asks him to get out. He says that nusbandhi does not mean castration. When Ishvar asks Om to remove his pant the officer threatens him:

I forbid you to take off your clothe in my office. I am not a doctor, and whatever is in your pants is of no interest to me. If we start believing you, then all the eunuchs in the country will come dancing to us, blaming us for their condition, trying to get money out of us. We know your tricks. The whole family planning programme will grind to a halt. The country will be ruined suffocated by uncontrolled population growth. Now get out before I call the police. (FB 540)

Om consoles his uncle and tells him that they will not help. Because Ishvar and Om are mere animals for them and even he accuses Ishvar that it happened because of Ishvar’s madness for coming there and finding a wife for him. Ishvar humiliated and insulted by the officer and grieved by Om’s comments, starts weeping.
“So you are saying we should have stayed hidden on the verandah for the rest of our days? What kind of this, where we cannot come and go as we please? Is it a sin to visit my native place? To get my nephew married?” (FB 541)

The villagers are not able to voice their opinions; even if they do, they won’t be taken into consideration, as they are not part of the elite. The feeling of being silenced internally exiled and marginalized become part of their identity.

Helplessness of Public Servants:
The political Clout of the village Zamindar, Thakur Dharmasi is quite evident when he directs the doctor to operate upon Om too who, is a mere youth waiting to get married. They return to the city, Omprakash is unable to marry and Ishvar is unable to work as both his legs have been amputated because of the gangrene that sets in as the operations are done in less sanitary conditions and Ishvar’s legs then become affected with gangrene and both his limbs have to be amputated. The description is particularly grotesque as the author mentions, “From the groin to the knee the flesh had become black”. (FB 541) Ashraf Chacha, a grand old man, also goes through a vasectomy and loses his life after the operation. Michael Henderson in Experiment with Untruth: India under Emergency describes an event of the Emergency Period as follows:

“Farmers were forced to get sterilized or their water and electricity would be stopped, fathers likewise in order to get their children accepted in schools. Motivation quotes had imposed on teachers, civil servants and employees of all kinds. Women teachers suffered the indignity in order to even to get their salary paid to them.” (69)

Permanent Victims of Oppression:
The Dalits are forever victims of oppression, either in the form of class and caste. Their presence within the structure of the novel represents the common man in the context of both urban and rural India. As Nandini Bhautoo observes: “Their trajectory allows them to encounter the dispossessed of both rural and urban areas….They are not at the receiving end of insane plans of the government….their suffering from village to town and the city allows Mistry to speak of powerlessness and oppression, in both city and counting as a continuum.” (55) Eventually they turn up as beggars in the big city. As Valmik philosophies on life: “After all, our lives are but a sequence of
accidents—a clanking chain of chance events. A string of choices, casual or deliberate, which add up to that big one calamity we call life.” (FB 564)

**Laws of Manu:**

The cruel Landlords are green with envy at the birth of male issues in Dalits families. The caste Hindus fret and fume, blame it on the supervision of the time honoured social order.

What is happening in the world? They complained. Why two sons in an untouchable's house, and not even one in ours? What could a Chamar 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. (FB 100)

Therefore, the Thakurs and the Pandits begin to “whip the world into shape” (FB 101) by abusing, beating up and inflicting all kinds of horrible punishments on the Chamars. Dukhi, for instance, gets a good thrashing as substitute for a glass of goats how brutally and inhumanly some of the elders in his caste had once punished. Mistry describes how the upper-castes make use of the disciplining mechanism to ensure that individuals were constantly located in their fixed, unchangeable place.

**Deprival of Right to Vote:**

Mistry caricatures the Indian electoral system, which is nothing but a force in his views. During the elections, the Landlords cast the votes whereas the Dalit Voters have to leave the thumb impression on the ballots. Mukul Kesavan, while commenting on the tragic as well as realistic aspect of the novel says that section of the novel “reads like script of a bad Bengali film.” (80)

Narayan spends so many years in town insists that he will fight for his rights. Here is a passage about it:

Next time there is an election, I want to mark my own ballot, said Narayan. ‘They won’t let you,’ said Dukhi. ‘And why bother? You think it will change anything. Your gesture will be a bucket falling in a well deeper than centuries. The splash won’t be seen or heard.’ ‘It is till my right. And I will exercise it in the next election, I promise you.’ ‘Lately you are brooding too much about rights. Give up this dangerous habit.’ ‘Give up this idea. It is wasting your time is your life.’ ‘Life without dignity is worthless.’ (FB 144)
Feudal Oppression and Torture:
The novel is replete with various instances of feudal oppression and torture that still loom large on the lives of the under-privileged Dalit people in the villages of India. Some Dalit characters have depicted being tortured to death. Whenever they have wanted to assert their rights as human beings and free citizens, they have suppressed brutally and inhumanly:

Thumbprint I will sign my full name, after you give me my ballot. Two men in the line behind Narayan were inspired by him. Yes, give us our ballots, they said. We also want to make our mark. We cannot do that, we don’t have instructions. You don’t need instructions. It is our right as voters. After we vote…This time he did not laugh but raised his hand as though in farewell and left the booth. The men seized Narayan and the other two. They forced their thumbs to the ink pad and completed the registration. Thakur Dharamsi whispered to his assistant to take the three to his farm. His men urinated on the three inverted face. In the evening after the ballot boxes were taken away. Burning coals were held to the three men’s genitals, stuffed into their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village until their lips and tongues melted away. The still silent bodies were taken down from the tree. When they began to stir, the ropes were transferred from their ankles to their necks, and the three were hanged. (FB 145-146)

Atrocities on Dalits and Women:
Thus, Narayan and his two companions undergo brutal torture before they have hanged in the village square. Other Dalits have beaten up random, their women have raped and their huts have burnt down. The Thakur decides that Dukhi’s family deserves special punishment: “His arrogance went against everything we subvert that he had twisted the caste merely by turning cobbler into tailors, distorting society’s timeless balance. Crossing the line of caste had to be punished with the utmost severity,” said the Thakur. (FB 147)

Then Dukhi, Roopa, Radha, and the daughters along with Narayan’s corpse have burnt alive at the behest of the Thakur. To quote the incident from the text:

Two are missing, said Thakur Dharamsi. ‘Son and grandson’ ‘Well, never mind, these five will do’. Only by the red birthmark on his chest could they
recognize Narayan. A long howl broke from Radha. But the sound of grief soon mingled with family’s death agony; the house was set alight. The first flames licked at the bound flesh. The dry winds, furiously fanning the fire, showered the only spark of mercy during this night. The blaze swiftly enfolded all six of them. (FB 147)

Questioning the event Jagdish Batra comments:

“Finally, Dukhi, his wife and daughters are burnt alive. The purpose behind allowing such a large canvass to the depiction of poverty, deprivation, dirt and squalor that pervades the Indian scene seems to be to underline the enormity of the problem. Where is the hope for the balance, a fine one at that?” (93)

**Justice Being Sold:**

Ishvar and Omprakash survive from the brutal attack as they leave in the town with Ashraf away from the village. By the time the news of the massacre of their family reach to them, the dead bodies have dispersed into the river. Ishvar with Ashraf Chacha go the police station to file an FIR after the cruel massacre of their family they are threatened and silenced by the Inspector that, “What kind of rascality is this? Trying to fill up the F. I. R with lies? You filthy achoot castes are always out to make troubles! Get out before we charge you with public mischief! (FB 148) Altogether, it was a time of exploitation and violence, destruction and bloodshed. As Ibrahim reveals the people have nothing but sorrow when the world has controlled by wicked people: “These emergence times are terrible, sister. Money can buy the necessary police order. Justice is sold to the highest bidder.” (FB 432)

The dastardly and heinous perpetration of the gruesome murder of the three namely Narayan and his companions and the total massacre of their family members by setting ablaze their huts corroborate the grim fact that the Dalits are always the hapless victims at the hands of the heartless upper caste.

**Deprival of Education:**

As knowledge is the true deliverer of the Dalits from exploitation and oppression, the Landlords by all mean try to deny them education. Narayan and his brother Ishvar who had denied the chance of getting education, stealthily enters a school through the window. They take slates and chalks from the cupboard, sit cross-legged on the floor or they have so often watched the upper-caste children do and begin to draw lines.
They are very eager to learn how to read and write like the upper caste children. They have punished savagely by the teacher who has called the God. This is absolutely unbearable to those tender and young children. Dalit children have not only verbally abused but also cruelly beaten up by the teacher in *A Fine Balance*.

Shameless little donkey’s! Off with you or I’ll break your bones! ‘You Chamar rascals? Very brave you are getting, daring to enter the school! He twisted their ears till they yelped with pain and started to cry…Is this what your parents teach you? To defile the tools of learning and knowledge? Answer me! Is it?’‘Wanted to look! Well, I will show you now! I will show you the back of my hand!’ Holding on to Narayan, he slapped six times in quick succession across the face, delivered the same number to his brother’s face. (FB-109-111) He makes them remove their pants and then beats them up with a cane, “the watching children flinched each time they came landed on the bare bottoms. A little boy started cry. (FB 111)

The savage beatings and all that ill treatment by the teacher, Dukhi Mochi decides to call on the so-called chit-pavan Brahmin who is considered to be a descendant from the purest among the pure, from the keepers of the sacred knowledge. After giving ointment to Dukhi, Pandit Lalluram gives him advice.

Enraged by Pandit Lalluram’s explanation and justification to the misdemeanor of the schoolteacher, Dukhi suggests that the Chit-pavan Brahmin should be called “Goo-Khavan Brahmin”. (FB 114) Dukhi’s friend Chotu rolls with laughter and delight and agrees that, “Shit-Eating Brahmin was indeed a more suitable name.” (FB 114) Such audacious insults show the Dalit people’s mental aggression towards the upper caste.

**Instinct for Revenge:**
Rohinton Mistry’s characters are mentally aggressive. The circumstance of their living induces them to rave for revenge. (i.e. tit for tat) It is important to note that Omprakash shows the signs of rebel in him for the murder of his family. He keeps the thought of revenge over Thakur Dharamsi, who killed all the members of his family as whole. It has vividly pictured in *A Fine Balance* as:

I will gather a small army of Chamars will provide them with weapons then will march to the Landlord’s houses, said Omprakash, his sewing-machine racing. “It will be easy to find enough men. We’ll do it like the Naxalites..At
the end of it we will cut off their heads and put them on spikes in the market place. Their kind will never dare to oppress our community again…We’ll slaughter the Thakurs and their goondas. (FB 149)

The more surprising thing is that he wants to do it like Naxlites. “It will be easy to find enough men. We will do it like Naxlites.” (FB 149) Taking into consideration, the recent increased Naxlite activities in the country, it is likely that young boys like Omprakash, who have exploited and wronged by society and police became part of the Naxlite Movement. Omprakash further says, “At the end of it we’ll cut off their heads and put them on the spikes in the market place. Their kind will never dare to oppress our community again.” (FB 149) Though Ishvar wants to console and pacify his nephew, yet he keeps patience, because he feels the same impulse. He knows that Omprakash needs time to heal his wounds. He knows, “The hands were easy to divert with sewing, but the tormented mind was difficult to free from turmoil.” (FB 149)

Double Standards of High Caste People:
Roopa’s exploitation by the Watchman of the Richman’s orchard is Mistry’s harsh comment on the double standards evident even in the practice of untouchability. It is an instance of tragic irony that a high-caste lustful man who would consider himself polluted even by the shadow of a low –caste still covets and sleeps with a desirable Dalit woman. Driven to the extreme of becoming a thief by starvation, poverty, and helplessness the Dalit woman loses her chastity under coercion. Thus, she laments her pathetic state.

This scene shows that Roopa feels exiled, depressed and isolated socially after being raped as there is no place to turn for help. Roopa does not have a lot of support within her family and members of her community with whom she can confide her misfortune. She does not seem to feel secure to share her personal experiences. She feels they cannot be safely discussed within her family and she will be looked down upon. She also finds it hard to discuss this rape with her husband Dukhi. So the lower caste man has shown to be unable to defend his wife. The result is the shame and especially the helplessness of being an untouchable woman.

Though the upper class thugs of the village do not want to see the shadow of the Dalits, they do not hesitate to fulfill their lust with the women belonging to the lower and untouchable castes.
**Doubly Exploited:**
The condition of Dalit women was not so better inside the Dalit families also. Dalit women are still treats inferior to the Dalit male. One who so much wanted the society to change seemed unaware of the injustice has done inside his own family.

No one paid attention to Leela and Rekha if their brother was in the house. They always kept quiet without protest and arguing with the adults. More often, though they wept quietly in their bed. Mathew Mincy observes:

“Times have changed and laws have changed, but there are thousands of women like Leela and Rekha who are the silent victims of subjugation both in the society and in home. They still weep quietly in their beds without being able to protest and argue. They are only a few instances of injustice quoted from Mistry’s novel. Dalit women around the world still wallow in the shackles of caste with a hope that the systems will change and thus transforming their lives for the better.” (79)

**Caste within Caste:**
Mistry’s characters are both oppressors and oppressed. According to Mistry, there is a caste within caste, needs to be eradicate. Mistry points out how Narayan’s mother advises him not to deal with the lower caste among them. For example, when a Bhangi ventured towards the hut of Narayan, Roopa, though she herself a Chamar, rebukes him, using the same language as her upper caste oppressors; “where do you think you are going? ....I’ll bathe your filthy skin with the boiling water.” (FB 133)
She chides her son, “We are not going to deal with such low-caste people! How can you think of measuring someone who carts the shits from people’s houses?” (FB 133)

**Gandhian Ideology:**
Mahatma Gandhi was a national Icon for Indian freedom struggle movement. He was a mass leader followed by millions. But with changing time people changed their ideals. Here in this novel Mistry shows how Gandhi has become absolute during the period of emergency in India. After listening the speech of Mahatma Gandhi, Dukhi doubts whether “the Zamindars in our village would clap for a speech about getting rid of the caste system.” (FB 108) Ashraf replies, “They would clap, go on in the same old way.” (FB 108)
Social Realism:
For years, everything appears peaceful. Then comes the general election during which chamars came into conflict with the Landlords, Zamindars and the Thakurs. Mistry gives graphic details of ruthless exploitation, tortures, booth rigging and the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden. Even after the twenty years of an independence nothing has changed. When Narayan returns to the village and sets up his own tailor’s shop, an event strongly resented by the villagers especially Thakur Dharamsi, the village chieftain. Even though Narayan’s life has changed, he confesses his deep dissatisfaction to his father. Dukhi responds:

‘How can you say that? So much has changed. Your life, my life, your occupation from leather to cloth, and look at your house, your - ‘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.’ ‘Those kinds of things take time to change’.’ More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like’…‘Son, those are dangerous things to want. You changed from Chamar to tailor. Be satisfied with that.’ Narayan shook his head. ‘That was your victory.’ (FB 142-143)

Richa Bijalwan remarks:
“Rohinton Mistry narrates the social realities, particularly related to Dalits, in this novel where he dismisses all other externalities which compel and restrict identities and distinctions based on caste, religious or racial disparities. He brings a social consciousness against this atavistic custom by making bold and dauntless statements in this novel.” (Bijalwan 148)

From Landlord to Politician:
Mistry very carefully brings into the novel the transition of one time landlords into powerful politician in the democratic set up and continuing their atrocities. Savita Goel in this connection observes, “Mistry stresses the fact in post-colonial India the plight of common people has not ameliorated and they have to face the same exploitation and injustice.” (192)
Limitations of the Text:
Mistry’s description of the problems of untouchability with sordid details of age-old caste system relates from Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*. Unlike Anand, Mistry fails to indicate a solution to the problem of untouchability that has been eating into the vitals of the country. Ananta in Anand’s *The Big Heart*, returns to his home town Amritsar, organizes the Thathliars and finally lays down his life for their sake.

In *A Fine Balance* also Omprakash has a dream of gathering “a small army of Chamar and providing them with weapons, then march to the landlord’s house.” (FB 149) Mistry’s extreme skepticism and hopelessness do not allow him to offer any sign of redemption and consequently Om’s dream never materializes but he becomes an invalid beggar similarly the Gandhian philosophy also fails in their mission.

Conclusion:
Mistry’s novel is different from their predecessors in the treatment of the Dalit subject. He has allowed for the development of Dalit character, unlike Anand and Premchand, and has dealt with the issues severely plaguing Dalits of India. Unlike Anand and Premchand, he is of the opinion that change in profession can lead the economic betterment, which is essential for the development of Dalit consciousness. The two tailors in *A Fine Balance* have held up as paradigmatic examples. Having escaped their heredity occupation (leather workers belonging to the Chamar caste) their lives are blighted by tragedy and misfortune and some Dalit critics suggest that such literary creations do little to inspire a more robust Dalit consciousness. The translation of Valmiki’s autobiography (2003) notes-

“…portrayals of Dalits as mute and pathetic characters, unable to act or speaks about their oppression, characteristic of high caste Indian writers. Dalits in their writings are portrayed as tragic figures and objects of pity, incapable of talking back or feeling enraged. Booker prize winner Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* or Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* are also written in their appropriate voice, a voice that contains, rather than experiences, Dalit experience.” (IX)

It is concluded that among the three texts selected for present study, Mistry holds the most faithful mirror to the issue of Dalit consciousness. He is most relevant to his time and situation of the Dalits in the context of changing times in India.
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