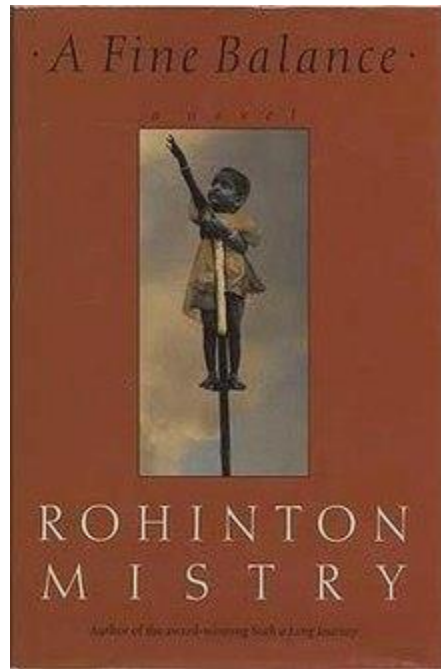


Portrayal of Subaltern Literary Concept in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

Ms. K. Geetha, Dr. R. Vijaya and Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu



Abstract

Subaltern theme has become so prominent that it is regularly used in various disciplines. The word Subaltern means inferior in rank or of secondary importance. Three outstanding thinkers have contributed to the field of 'subaltern studies'. They are: Antonio Gramsci, Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Spivak. According to Julian Wolfreys people who are marginalized, oppressed and exploited on the cultural, political, social and religious ground are grouped as 'subaltern'. Thus Subaltern literature reflects various themes such as oppression, marginalization, Gender discrimination, subjugation of lower and working classes, disregarded women, neglected sections of society, deprived classes etc. In the context of globalization, 'Third World countries' are encountering the state of poverty and oppression. 'Subaltern literature' is one of the subdivisions of post colonialism'. Antonio Gramsci says that the word 'subaltern' is drawn from the Late Latin 'subalternus'. It means any officer in the British army who is 'Lower in rank' than a captain. Its adjectival form denotes 'of inferior rank'. But Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci for the first time used it outside the non-military sense. In Latin 'sub' means 'under' and 'alter' means other. So literally it denotes to any person or group of inferior position. He

refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Gramsci stressed the connotation of this expression in terms of Gender, Class, Caste, Race, and culture. Gayatri Spivak includes a new dimension to the term 'subaltern'. She includes the colonized people, oppressed generations, working classes, blacks and muted women in the category of 'subaltern people'. B.K. Das opines that Gayatri Spivak has expanded the meaning of 'subaltern' to those who were treated with hardship especially those who got suppressed because of their gender. She laid the stress on gendered subaltern-that is-woman who was doubly oppressed by colonialism and particularly in the Third World countries.

Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry is one of the internationally acknowledged writers and his works have won international accolades. Canada based, Rohinton Mistry is the author of three novels and a short story-collections set amidst the closely knit and isolated Parsi community in Bombay. His writings bear a social purpose. He is one of the prominent writers of the post-colonial era. His novels deal with the theme of exploitation based on the political, economic and social aspects stressing 'the evil of untouchability'- mostly found to be in practice among the Hindus of our country. Rohinton Mistry attempted his best to voice the cruelty and oppression experienced by these muted untouchables in his novel *A Fine Balance*. The novel exposes class and caste disparities of Indian society which also mirrors a visual rendering of those who endure its inequities. This paper attempts to discuss the portrayal of subaltern concept in *A Fine Balance*

Keywords: Rohinton Mistry, Subaltern, post colonialism, marginalized, oppressed, exploited, untouchability.

Introduction

Untouchability has been practiced in India since time immemorial. This social evil is in vogue even today. Rohinton Mistry attempted his best to voice the oppression experienced by the untouchables in his novel *A Fine Balance*. In this novel he talks about "chamirs" who are born into a leather making chamirs family. The high caste people treat them in a brutal manner. The inhumanity of the upper caste people is portrayed by Mistry.

A Fine Balance

The character Sita was stoned for walking on the upper caste side of the road. Gambir had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within the range of the temple while prayers were on. Dayaram did not follow the agreement to plough a land lord's field and he had to face an ugly, indecent treatment. Dhiraj negotiated in advance with Pandit about the wages. Pandit got irritated and leveled a false charge against him. He accused of Dhiraj poisoning his cows and had him hanged. Untouchability is a sin, it denigrates not only Hindu religion but the entire Indian society. Rohinton Mistry says, 'What is this disease?' you may ask. This disease is 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 all children are children of the same GOD. Remember what Gandhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of Arsenic poisons milk'.

The Story

We find four characters. Dina and Mameck are Parsees. Shiva and his nephew Omprakash are tailors. The pathetic condition of the tailors is described here. The ancestors of these tailors were in fact 'Chamirs' or 'MOCHIS'. The caste violence made Dukhi, a Mochi and grandfather of Omprakash and father of Ishvar compelled to escape to the town nearby. There they learnt the dexterities of tailoring in the town. The physical displacement to the city made them happy. After some time, they desired to return to their village with enough money they had earned. The father of Ishvar who was doing unclean work cherished seeing a better life of Ishvar and Narayan. He left his children at the custody of Ashraf, his Muslim friend. Ashraf was kind enough to take them as apprentices in his tailoring sector. Dukhi Mochi said sarcastically, "at least my Muslim friend treated me better than my Hindu friends".

During a very difficult situation Ishvar and Narayan saved Asaraf's shop saying that they were the owners. After returning to his village Narayan started a tailoring shop of his own and became successful. He constructed a house, got married and became the father of a son and two daughters. Narayan's business was good until an election was declared by a land lord, Thakar who had killed the parents of Omprakash. An atrocity on the lower caste was on the rise. They were not allowed to continue their education. Ishvar and Narayan were beaten up as they entered into a school. Dukhi approached Pandit Lalluram a Brahmin priest and pleaded for justice. The untouchables innocently believed that Lalluram was impartial and he was a Daniel in his judgement. But they were shocked to see the true face of Lalluram. He proved himself an unmannered, crooked fellow who would never support an untouchable. Dukhi got frustrated and said, "government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper caste bastards still treat us worse than animals...".

The untouchables were neither permitted to use the village well nor permitted to enter the temple. The women folk were also exploited by the high caste people. Rupa, wife of Dukhi was sexually exploited by the gardener of the Zamindhar. She was accused of stealing the fruits and milk from the upper caste families to feed her children. Rohinton Mistry wonders at the dual standard of the Upper caste Hindus. They call them untouchables but don't hesitate to exploit the downtrodden. Even the local body elections were not conducted in a fair way. The land lord's men filled up the blank ballots and deprived them of their voting rights.

Prakash's father and his two children were killed. Ishver and Omprakash went to the police station to prefer a complaint. The sub-inspector was rough and unsympathetic. He said, "What kind of rascality is this? Trying to fill up the 'FIR' with lies? You filthy achool caste are always out to make troubles! Get out before we charge you with public mischief." Every stage is a challenge to the untouchables. They went to the village in search of a bride for Omprakash. Unfortunately, they were cheated and victimized by the high caste villains. Under the stream of 'free vasectomy programme' the innocent untouchables were cheated and maltreated.

Conclusion

The theme of subaltern literature is oppression and exploitation of the weak and under privileged. Rohinton Mistry, a Booker Prize winner gives a heartrending picture of man's barbaric inhumanity towards another man.

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Editor: *Indian Writing in English: A Subaltern Perspective*

Ms. K. Geetha, Dr. R. Vijaya and Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu

Portrayal of Subaltern Literary Concept in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

References

- Rohinton Mistry**, *A Fine Balance Paperback* – November 30, 2001.
Prof.M.Dharmaraj's Indian Writing in English: *Subaltern Literary concept– Oppression of Untouchables in Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance.*
Das, B.K.Ed. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, New Delhi. Atlantic Pub& Dist2007
Guha, Ranjit. Ed. *Subaltern Studies*, Vol., VII, Oxford, 1982
Gayatri Spivak's Interview in US Journal Polygraph 1980
-
-

Ms. K. Geetha

Assistant Professor

Dr. S. Thirunavukkarasu

E. G. S. Pillay Engineering College

Nagapattinam-611 002

Kpsgeethaprofessor@gmail.com

Dr. R. Vijaya

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Annamalai University

Annamalainagar