



**Dalit Literature a mode to show the plight of Dalits in Rohinton Mistry's A  
*Fine Balance* and Kancha Ilaiah's *Untouchable God***

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**Abstract:**

Dalit intellectuals operate their mode of resistance creatively through Dalit literature, the most powerful expression. Dalit literature is an arduous endeavor from the canonical to the marginal, from mega narratives to micro narratives, from the virtual to the real and from self emulation to self affirmation. It is also a composite and homogeneous body of massive creative corpus emerging from different regional language literatures such as Marathi, Hindi, Gujrati, Punjabi etc. Thus, Dalit literature is the voice of the people who are subjugated, downtrodden and marginalized. Focusing on the harassment of Dalits, Mistry chooses the story of Dukhi, a Dalit to describe the discrimination occurs in rural areas, Kancha Ilaiah chooses the story of Pariah and Sita Maha Laxmi to show the class discrimination in Indian society.

**Key Words:** Caste discrimination, Marginalized, suffering, Sexual oppression.

Dalit is a term taken from Marathi word 'Dalan' i.e. a class that is exploited. The term Dalit literature was first used in 1958 at the first ever conference of Dalit literature in Bombay. Thereafter this literature started bringing forth the oppression of socially ostracized and 'voiceless' Dalits in multifarious genres. K. Satichidanand writes "Dalit literature empowers the marginalized by retrieving the voices, spaces and identities silenced or suppressed by castiest powers.

It is a literature of protest against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. As Dr. C.B. Bharti claims: "the aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the

established system which is based on justice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher class". There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics of Dalit literature.

Kancha Ilaiah is an Indian academician, writer and activist for Dalits rights. He was born in 1952 in the village Papaiahpet, Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh. His family belonged to the sheep-grazing Kuruma Golla caste. Ilaiah cited his mother as one of the influential people who shaped his political ideas. According to Ilaiah, she was at the forefront of the Kurumas' struggle against the forest guards discriminatory behaviour, and she was killed during a violent confrontation while protesting against police brutality.

Rohinton Mistry was born in 1952 in India to a Parsi family. He graduated in Mathematics and Economics from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. He migrated to Canada in 1975 with his would be wife. He wrote notable novels like *Such a Long Journey*, *Family Matters*.

The aim of this research paper is to show the marginalized and downtrodden life of Dalits. The paper deals with suppression of the marginalized Indian community whether it is present in the Dalit autobiographies or in literature written about the marginalized dalits. The marginalized voice of Dalits echoes in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kancha Ilaiah's *Untouchable God* through the acts of untouchability imposed on Dalit community. They are being treated as beasts due to their belonging to the lower castes and being in the margin. They are marginalized socially, economically and politically and they are exploited by the upper class society. They are marginalized and if a person is in margin, he is unable to evolve out himself whether due to being economically backward, destitute of basic needs or suppressed by upper class people. Minorities, lower castes, racially discriminated, traditionally categorized, women, social tribes etc. are the sections on the margin in the society. In India we find that Dalits are the most marginalized people in our society and they have to tolerate the painful struggle of being outcaste and oppressed in a jaundiced society.

Untouchability prevailed ubiquitously since the evolution of society. In the society upper class people had always been privileged. They had exploited the lower caste people. Untouchability is deeply rooted in Indian society. In India one cannot imagine a society without divisions. In the Indian society there are two divisions, one is upper class and the second is lower class. Lower class people are those who had always been the sufferer, marginalised and

downtrodden. Focusing on the harassment of Dalits, Mistry chooses the story of Dukhi, a Dalit to describe the discrimination occurs in rural areas. In order to change the future of his son, Ishvar and Narayan, Dukhi sends them to a tailor from where having returned as tailors, when Narayan and Ishvar try to emulate the upper caste people; it is not accepted by them who don't want the lower caste people to raise their Dalit voice against any disparity. Once when Narayan uses his right of voting and tries to cast his vote in the election, he with his friends is "flogged as they hung naked by their ankles from the branches from a banayan tree" (146) to teach them a lesson for raising voice against the upper class people.

The marginalized conditions of Dalits appear once again when the two Dalit protagonist enter the village school and try to touch the contents like charts, pictures and books etc. kept in class room but their act is noticed by school teacher and school teacher soon make them realize that they are lower creatures and are bound to be treated as savages:

You chamar rascals! Very brave you are

Getting, daring to enter the school! He

Twisted their ears till they are yelped with pain

and started to cry. (110)

When tormented by the school master, sobbing Ishvar and Narayan go to his father Dukhi to make a complaint against the school teacher's atrocities; Dukhi goes to the Pundit Laluram who is known as Chitpavan Brahmin of the village, but instead of justice Dukhi receives a hypocritic answer of his question from Pundit Laluram who remarks:

You understand these are four varnas in

Society; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and

Shudra. Each of us belong to one of these

Four varnas, they cannot mix. (113)

Dissatisfied Dukhi finds himself subdued before the upper caste and his voice remains marginalized and unheard.

This discard of dalit's voice was due to his being in margin as an untouchable. The untouchability derives in India from four Varna's which is defined as in manusutra, consisted of four major classifications namely Brahmins believed to have originated from the head of body, Kshatriyas originated from shoulders, Vashiyas from belly, and Shudras issued from feet. This definition shows inbuilt social imbalance of Indian society which remains always and this social imbalance is also mentioned in 'A Fine Balance' where Dukhi, a dalit person, violates caste restriction by attempting to change the future of his sons.

The revolution of Dukhi to bring his family out of caste restriction shows his boldness to challenge a conservative religious society in which fortune of a person is decided by his caste instead of his capability and caliber. The novel also throws light on the injustice, the cruelty, the traumas and the disparity taking place in rural India.

Kancha Ilaiah echoes the life of Dalits in his novel *Untouchable God* through the acts of caste discrimination imposed on Dalit community. Paraiyah while walking back to his home through his thoughts reflects the class discrimination that he is ordered to kill a chicken and in return he will only be able to taste the bones "...landlord ordered him to kill a chicken, but he also longed to taste the chicken curry which he liked so much. To no end: he would get only bones as his reward for the slaughter" (Ilaiah 3-4). Kancha Ilaiah further emphasized class discrimination by telling us about position of the houses of the caste Hindus and untouchables situated in the village "... the Brahmins lived on the other side of the village, far away from this street. They lived in their divine feudal lands called agraharas. The Gods gave them lands so they could stay away from productive humans..." (5).

Kancha Ilaiah, through minute examples of class discrimination, shows life of Dalits when he talks about the cloths that the Brahmins wear and the number of cloths the untouchables have, Paraiyah asserts "The landlords have lots of clothes. Their children wear...coloured clothes. Ours go naked. I go half-naked. My wife has a sari and a blouse" (Ilaiah 7). Paraiyah is very sad being discarded by caste discrimination. He frequently asks to God that which God had created the upper caste people and which God had created the lower caste people. Paraiyah intermingled in his thoughts coming back to his home was unaware of the fact, who is coming in front of him

on the other side and he was brutally beaten for his crime of thinking about god “you bastard, how dare you think about Soul, God and Caste?” (Ilaiah 8).

Upper caste people had always been in the position to manipulate the Dalits for their own sake. They had restricted their thinking, their nature of work. Caste Hindus had always enjoyed this privilege over Dalits. They cannot tolerate that a Dalit think about God because thinking about God is the right of Brahmins only. So other than the Brahmins no one can think of God, and when Paraiiah committed this crime he had to pay in return as he was tormented brutally. Kancha Ilaiah expressed his views about Dalits life that how the dalits had been suffered at the hands of Caste Hindus and how the thinking of dalits had been restricted by them. How they had been restricted to remain mum on caste divisions.

‘Your face was expressing signs of thought. You were not even looking to see who, as you walked, was coming from the opposite direction or from the side. If Paraiiahs begin to think, the day would come when our Gods-our Gods in Heaven- our Gods on earth-would have to stop thinking. All the Heavens would collapse and Hell would come to earth. *Unthinkable . . . unthinkable,*’ said another voice.

Yet another voice warned, ‘Don’t think about caste, but live in it. Caste is caste. They created it so that you would not think. Thinking among the Pariahs is likely to be the source of every evil in this village . . . in this area . . . in this country . . . in this world. ‘our Lords on Earth wanted to take the practice of caste all over the world and now you want to kill it here. Where do you think our Gods have gone? It is because, of late, all untouchable bastards are thinking.(Ilaiah 9-10)

Kancha Ilaiah further depicts the reality of Dalit women. The lower caste women are treated as sexual dolls and concubines by men. They simply use them and throw away. Though the women who belong to lower caste are called untouchable but their body is touchable and they can be used as the men wish. In this novel Namboodri, a Brahmin from Kerala who is twenty he went to Govindan Nair’s house and he spoke to him and he proposed his wish for sambandham with his daughter Sita Mahalaxmi. With this happy news Govindan Nair went to tell his wife but his wife was weeping and said

“My hopes are crumbled. Do you really wish her to live in sambandham? With all the namelessness my life is better: she will have neither face, nor name. She will be the mother of Brahmin children but shall remain an unwed Nair. Can her children become Brahmins, let alone Namboodris? Can they become priests in any temple? You foolish man, how could you agree?” (Ilaiyah 28).

She disagrees to give to Brahmins but Govindan Nair roared

“A Brahmin- Namboodri- is a God of Gods on Earth. Whatever they ask, they ask only to increase our virtue. Our Gods said that whatever a Brahmin asks, you must give it- whether it be wealth, cattle or daughter. I feel that God has blessed with a spiritual demand that I must place daughter at the disposal of this great Namboodri and none can stop it. None can change the law!” (29).

Sita Mahalaxmi overheard the conversation and started weeping. By spending time around her mother she has learnt a lot about the world of women. But that world had no status of its own. The day came where he and Sita were alone in the room and it was their first night. He experimented all the nasty things the sixty four arts and it continued for many days and he said this is what Rama did to Sita and Vishnu did to Laxmi. She was forced to sleep with the Namboodri. She begot three kids for him. Aryavartha was the only country where the Gods exalted the spiritual sex. He was reminded of the Rig Veda which contained slokas after slokas about how Indra, the God of Gods have loved women- not his wife of course- the apsaras, divine prostitute created by Gods to satisfy their own pleasure. He asked her how do you like this life Sita? She replied “I live the life of a dog, shut in a kennel, whelping every so often. When my master caresses me, I fawn on him,” (39). While the Brahmin justified whatever they did was right either it be food, women, work or sex. “A Brahmin enters into the sexual act not for the appetites of his physical body but for the pleasure of God, while the Shudras, the untouchables, the tribals- the undivine archaic people- enter into the act only to have their own selfish bodily pleasure.” (30) So they were not considered to be divine. Hence the sons born to those castes do not have the power to send the father’s soul to heaven. This was the reason why they remained Shudras, Chandalas and tribals. Aryavartha was

the only country where the Gods exalted the spiritual sex. He was reminded of the Rig veda which contained slokas after slokas about how Indra, the God of Gods have loved women- not his wife of course- the apsaras, divine prostitute created by Gods to satisfy their own pleasure. “Occasionally he regretted that he had to perform his researches with such low material.” (35)

To come to a conclusion we can say that caste discrimination, inherited by birth, leaves Dalits to face multiple oppressions that violate them socially and culturally. Being the most marginalised class of the society they are the poor, illiterate and easy targets for sexual harassment. Dalits not only face caste violence imposed on them by the caste Hindus, but also gender and religious discrimination. Education is the only ray of hope that can give them right to flourish and overcome the struggles imposed on them by the Caste Hindus. Learning will transform them and make them cultured in terms of knowledge, improve their standard of living and it will give them courage to question the atrocities done to them by the upper caste people in terms of gender, caste, religion, sex etc.

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