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**SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVES AND CONDITIONS IN ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*  
AND MISTRY'S *A FINE BALANCE***

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Abstract

At present India, the term 'Dalits' draws enormous attention from a various place like a civilized society, educational institution, city and so on; it seems to be rampant in all places such as cruel, inhuman and violent physical and psychological treatment of the lower class/caste people. These people also moreover consider that all those things got it from the Four Vedhas. As per the norms of Hindu Mythology, the image of the untouchables is hegemonies with such biases that it limits the possibility to treat those untouchables as human beings.

The untouchable/poor/lower class people dreamt that this condition will change after gets independence from the British. But independence of India does not change the scenario; rather the untouchables have faced more intense complexities and difficulties in independent India. Realizing this uncomfortable situation, the Indian English writers and the Dalit have come forward to represent those oppressed People Conditions through the medium of literature. In this paper, we have to explore both author comparisons about the lower class people.

Keywords: *Untouchability, representation, subalterns, struggle, and escape.*

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Introduction

Among the Indian English writers, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan played a crucial role to bring India's controversial inner issues in front of the world in the first half of the twentieth century. Those issues can be considered local issues of the Indian sub-continent but those have a universal appeal. We also observe that the other Indian writers from the present time have continued the trend of representing the struggle of the subalterns at various phases of life. Among those writers of the present time, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, and Rohinton Mistry are remarkable writers for their creative and in-depth perspectives. In this

article, we will critically examine the representation of subalterns which are brought from the two renowned novels *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry. Mulk Raj Anand and Rohinton Mistry are the two prominent writers in their respective time.

They are considered remarkable novelists for their attempt to represent so vividly the poor as well as the lower class people struggling for survival. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* concentrate on the miserable life of untouchable characters who try to change their living condition by entering the center from the periphery, but their attempt falls apart when it comes into conflict with reality. The portrayal of the subalterns in the two novels is the crucial subject to be analyzed critically because of their authenticity to represent the subalterns.

*Why are we always abused? I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high castes. The tonga-wallah was kind. He made me weep to tell me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. It is only the Hindus and the outcasts who are not sweepers. From them, I am a sweeper, sweeper—untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!*

Anand, 2001:43

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

Mistry, 1996:142

The hierarchical structure introduces the caste system which has been determined by one's profession inherited by birth. As they do not have the economic and political power to fight back the upper-class people's domination, they accept subjugation. They do not have the voice to speak out their condition and portray themselves before the world. They are named subalterns.

Literature always sketches the vulnerability and struggle of subjugated human beings. This novel does not limit itself in one particular area. It focuses on various areas and stages of India as well as the characters' lives. The most adroitness of the writer is in the attempt to intermingle national politics and individual's life not only in colonized India but also in postcolonial India. How the national unrest and politics affect the common people is exhibited with a lot of remarkable issues such as the fate of the poor and the lower class people.

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The laws of the state are supposed to help and protect the common people. Ironically, state and laws victimize the subalterns. Instead of protection and nurturing, the state pushes the subalterns into a risky and uncertain life. Dina to leave the house because of her garment business and having a paying guest, it becomes clear how oppression is being carried out on the subalterns. The people, especially poor village and city slum people, are forced to be sterilized. And Ishvar and Om also face the same problem. This sterilization program signifies a lot in the sense of future. It does not only sterilize the Indian young generation physically but also paralyzes India as an unproductive nation. The agitation along with violent riots emerges soon in reaction and pushes the country into emergency.

The representation of the subalterns is always a controversial issue for its authenticity. The subalterns are represented by the other's voices, especially by the writers and the historians. Though a perspective is automatically imposed to represent the subalterns before the reader, there is a chance of being biased and corrupted. Every time, the writer portrays the subaltern reality according to his/her background and viewpoint. Most of the time, other perspectives are overlooked. Interestingly, the historians as well as the writers who represent the national histories and important events of the past, rarely focus on the subalterns or lower class of the people in the society. They do not portray the lives and perspectives of the subalterns. At first, the term subaltern is used and defined primarily by the Italian Marxist and Philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1881 – 1937) in his writing.

After the whole family's death, Ishvar and Om go to the city. But they cannot change their lives in the city. There, they seek for a shelter and a job. Even though they get a job in Dina's house as tailors, misfortunes continuously follow them. Their slum house is destroyed by the government and they live in pavements. They struggle a lot but cannot have the opportunity to change their fate because of government policy. Even the political killings are pointed out in the novel by Mistry referring to Avinash's death. The cause of death is mysterious. Police say that he died in a railway accident. On the other hand, Avinash's parents claim that he was killed for Police torture. At this juncture, government and politics both fail to protect a student leader who shares the anti-emergency opinion: He tore his eyes from the photograph to read the rest of the article. The reporter had met the parents; he wrote ... they had, during the Emergency, lost their eldest under circumstances that were never satisfactorily explained. The police claimed it was a railway accident, but the parents spoke of wounds they had seen on their son's body at the morgue. According to the reporter, the injuries were consistent with other confirmed incidents of torture ....' (Mistry, 1996:594)

When Maneck expresses his surprise knowing that he is stopped to think or investigate by Dina. This transformation of Ishvar and Om is significant. Although it cannot be said in a strong

voice, what has happened to Ishvar and Om that happens to every subaltern in this world. But this is the outcome that most of the subalterns have to accept as their predetermined fate. The subalterns or peripheral group of people struggle hard for the changes in their life. Ironically, except few, all of them fall apart into a disaster where their existence turns into a miserable story: 'There is no wife, no children. They have become beggars.' 'Sorry – what, Aunty?' 'They are both beggars now.' 'That's impossible! Sounds crazy! I mean – aren't they ashamed to beg? Couldn't they do some other work, if there's no tailoring? I mean –' 'Without knowing everything you want to judge them?' she cut him off. (Mistry, 1996:606)

The two novels, Anand's *Untouchable* (2001) and Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), represent the subalterns with a close analysis of the condition of the subalterns which a few writers can attempt. But both the writers and their novels have not shown any direct path to the resolution of the problems of the untouchables. It can be understood from this paper that the struggle of the subalterns cannot end so easily. The writers have expressed their hope for the future relying on their own times' expectation. Anand tries to pin his hope for the betterment of the situation on the dream of Gandhian ideology and vision. On the other hand, Mistry shows how Anand's hope is destroyed in so-called modern India and how everything remains the same except the expectation for change which ultimately becomes for the writers, the characters and the readers the illusion of hope. Between Anand's and Mistry's novels, the time gap is around fifty years, but irony lies in the fact that – time passes, thing changes but the fate and struggle of the untouchables/subalterns do not change. They remain stagnant at the same point where they were before independence. But can we hope for any change in the future?

### Conclusion

Although there is more than fifty years' gap between the two novels, they portray the situation of the subalterns, a similar hostile falling to hold out any hope for them. We see the development of India as a country and nation, but the development has no positive effect upon the untouchables. The representation of the subalterns in the two novels is realistic, putting many controversial issues aside. Ironically, the struggle to reduce and erase the caste system along with poverty from the Indian societies has started from the beginning of the 20th century with the fall of British Empire, but till now the division into classes exists with its escalated strength and authority in independent India. The writers, especially Indian English writers utilizing the medium of literature, are continuously trying to give voice to the poor and lower class people for altering the subalterns' status.

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