

## **Unheard Agony: Portrayal of Dalit voices in *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry**

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Since long, literature has been given platform to various prevailing problems of society and therefore thus it has been proved in real sense, 'a voice of voiceless'. One of the social diseases which have been making our society hollow from inside is caste system. In modern times too, it's orthodox and so called traditional norms and customs have been making the unity of the people of the Indian Society fragile and frail. This paper represents the ironic condition as well as issues like a forced mass-sterilization campaign, violation of the fundamental rights of the people (Vote) and forced exile and imprisonment of the groups living below the poverty line as a result of Government's "beautification" program. These people are human, still not identified as a human by the society or surroundings, but merely dirt, not belong to this world or land and nomad. This study incorporates the account of pathetic life and hardship of two characters from a village who found themselves in middle of the epicentre- turmoil of Emergency era 1975 to 77. This paper excavates meaning of misery of marginalized voices by portraying and depicting the wretched life of Dukhi Mochi.

**KEYWORDS:** Dalits, Emergency, Jinx, Hapless, Unheard

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### **Introduction:**

Literature is always concerned with the humanity and mankind above anything else; a form of art which desires to transform the existing state of things for the better; a piece of writing which has an progressive thought process; a platform which provides voice to the misery of the weaker section of people; and above all a work of art which wishes to create a society, a better place to live in. In fact, a social reformer literature is a work of art which desires to serve the cause of humanity in astonishing ways. India English Literature is very rich and fortunate to

Have, in its long history, much extraordinary work of literature which has done amazing efforts for the betterment of the society and for the uplifting of the downtrodden.

### **Literature Reforming Society:**

We can say that whether it was a pre-independent time or the twenty-first century in both eras India has been really in need of good reformation literature which portrays the issues of the society in exact reality so that the people who are suffering from the same can have the stage to showcase their misery. Since long literature in regional language, as well as English, plays a vital role in reforming the society of India. Raja Rammohan Roy started a movement against the inhuman custom of Sati and is the pioneer of Indian Journalism, had written a number of articles on reforming society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar along with Swami Vivekananda raised voice against age-old custom of caste. Vidyasagar favored to modernizing India by admitting non-Brahmin students to the Sanskrit College whereas Swamiji condemned the caste-system. Swami Dayanand denounced the caste system by publishing his religious commentaries in Hindi. Jyotirao Govindrao Phule was one of the most radical reformers who has greatly influenced the movement of giving equal status to the poor and Dalit/Untouchables. The Indian writing both in regional and English language has played a radical and striking role in the uplifting of such backward class of the society.

### **Portrayal of Dalit Voices in “A Fine Balance”**

This novel is a reasonable proof of the dreadful condition of the ‘Chamaar Community’ known as ‘Mochi’ (Dalit or Untouchables depicted through the characters like Narayan, Dukhi, Roopa, Ishwar, and Omprakash), mainly found in the remote villages of India, who are being humiliated and tortured by the upper caste people (through the character Thakur Dharmasi) under a false and orthodox menace of caste system. This paper is an account of the misery and irony of Dalit community and how they are being offended, mistreated, manipulated, disrespected and tyrannized in the name of so-called conventional customs. Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* has been written totally in focus to the Dalits atrocities, centred by different subaltern characters both of Men and Women. As the typical Dalit literature, it showcases the Dalit psyche, Dalit

struggles and resistance in form of remonstrations to change their social 'liberty' from 'marginalise' to 'autonomy', the cruel customs foisted on them (Dalit) by the upper caste people.

**Dukhi Mochi:** The novel depicts an account of the life of Dukhi Mochi and his successors, suffocating for the free air during pre and post-independence era. This was the era of transformation, an era of new hope and change but not in the case of Dalit such as dukhi who is forbidden to misery and irony. The chapter 'IN A VILLAGE BY A RIVER' depicts the life of Chamaars, who are being forced to live at periphery as a result of so called customs. The village has been owned and under the influence of the Brahmins and the landowners (Zamindars). They marginalised with no rights to live even, forbidden to live a life without using any of the natural resources without the permission of the upper caste people, prohibited to get education, no right to roam anywhere when the upper caste are there on road: *'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'*. (AFB, 96)

Dukhi at the age of 18 married to Roopa a chammaar girl. After giving birth to three daughters who died soon within few months, Roopa delivered son-Ishvar. That was the first ever time Dukhi rejoiced with happy heart. Dukhi tries everything to give a healthy childhood to his son but his occupation doesn't allow him to do so as there are very few chances of getting wages in the village. Even when his wife Roopa who tries to steal oranges for Ishvar and being raped by the man who was hired to look after the grove of oranges, Dukhi didn't able to console her or raise his voice as he knew his status: *'Dukhi pretended to be asleep as she entered the hut. He heard her muffled sobs several times during the night, and knew, from her smell, what had happened to her while she was gone. He felt the urge to go to her, speak to her, comfort her. But he did not know what words to use, and he also felt afraid of learning too much. He wept silently, venting his shame, anger, humiliation in tears; he wished he would die that night'*. (AFB, 99) Even the birth of Narayan brings a new type of offence on Dukhi's head as: *'Perhaps the Chammaar had journeyed afar and kidnapped a Brahmin's newborns—this would explain everything'*. (AFB, 100)

At the house of Thakur Premji who called Dukhi for a work of making a powder out of red chillies, Dukhi again became a victim of hapless and powerlessness. Dukhi was being instructed to finish the given task before sunset so it was a great opportunity for him to get something for his family after few idle days. Thus in enthusiasm of completing task before sunset, the mortar being pated for the whole day, split cleanly in two and collapsed crushing Dukhi's left foot. It is very clear that Dukhi haven't done anything in this matter but he was offended by the wife of Thakur: *'The Thakur's wife was watching from the kitchen window. "Oiee, my husband! Come quick!" she screamed. "The Chamaar donkey has destroyed our mortar!"'* (AFB, 104) Thakur in arrives in rage, threading Dukhi for his did. Dukhi tried to defence him a lot but Thakur doesn't want listen a single word from him as he said: The Thakur lashed out wildly. *'"Listen, you stinking dog! You have destroyed my property, yet I am letting you off! If I wasn't such a softhearted fool, I would hand you to the police for your crime. Now get out!" He continued to swing the stick.'* (AFB, 105)

This incident has jolted Dukhi from inside and so he decided not to go for any such daily wage work at upper caste home. After his foot get healed, he went to town, commuting daily from village early in the morning and back at evening. Thus going into new profession Dukhi took all his tools metal last, awl, hammer, nails, cleats, and leather patches and chose a corner after surveying that there is no other cobbler and started repairing the torn and rough footwear of town dwellers. Dukhi found his inability at immense when his both son was tortured and punished by the upper caste person. The matter was that Narayan and Ishwar entered and touches the schoolhouse properties. Thus out of anger the school master caught both of them by their ears and dragged them outside: *"You Chamaar rascals! Very brave you are getting, daring to enter the school!"'* (AFB, 110) The schoolmaster was not satisfies and he asked for the cane to teach a lesson to both of the chamaar boys: *"Get the cane from the cupboard," he ordered a girl. "And you two remove your pants. After I am through, not one of you achhoot boys will ever dream of fooling with things you are not supposed to touch."* (AFB, 111) When Dukhi came to listen about what happen today with his sons, he decided to meet Pandit Lullaram, who possesses the status of a Chit-Pavan Brahmin—descended from the purest among the pure, for justice. He confronted the Pandit about what happened with him at Thakur Premji's home and then he

convey his inability to ask for justice for him but this time it is the matter of his sons: *“How much he slapped my sons—you should see their swollen faces, Panditji,” said Dukhi. “And their backsides look like an angry tiger raked them with his claws.”* (AFB, 112)

At last that ironic day arrives when Narayan asked for ballot instead of giving thumbprint guided by one of the person at election booth. This disapproval of Narayan brought Thakur Dharamsi into action who: *‘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’.* (AFB, 145) And then the fury starts which swallows the entire family of Dukhi: *‘THROUGHOUT the day, at intervals, they were flogged as they hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree. Drifting in and out of consciousness, their screams grew faint.’* (AFB, 146) The beating continues almost throughout the day as: *‘In the distance, in the far field, his men urinated on the three inverted faces. Semiconscious, the parched mouths were grateful for the moisture, licking the trickle with feeble urgency.’* (AFB, 146) After Thakur Dharamsi took away the ballot boxes into his safe custody: *‘burning coals were held to the three men’s genitals, then 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. The bodies were displayed in the village square.’* (AFB, 146) Soon Thakur along with his goondas arrives at Dukhi’s hut, with two dead bodies, one of Narayan. He ordered his followers stating: *‘And the father is more to blame than the son. His arrogance went against everything we hold sacred.’* *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’.* (AFB, 147) And finally all six were being caught, Roopa, Radha, Dukhi and grand three daughters of Dukhi, and *‘A long howl broke from Radha. But the sound of grief soon mingled with the family’s death agony; the house was set alight. The first flames licked at the bound flesh. The dry winds, furiously fanning the fire, showed the only spark of mercy during this night. The blaze swiftly enfolded all six of them.’* (AFB, 147)

### **Conclusion:**

In the chapter IN A VILLAGE BY A RIVER, Dukhi is only person who every time finds him in the centre of the turmoil of Casteism. For his entire life he has been suffered, oppressed, subjugated, tortured and menaced in the name of caste system. Not only this, whenever he asked for help, no one came forward to hold his hand. He along with his family gets rough treatment sometimes in the name of untouchable and sometimes without any reason. But the main reason behind their every suffering is of course, their belongingness to the lowest caste. Dalit were usually prohibited from full involvement in Indian social life. According to manmade customs, these people do not have any right to live, even no right on any things or objects in God created world. Dalit or untouchable could not enter a holy place or a schoolhouse and were lived a life of forced outcaste. High class people have much love and affection for their pets, Cow or any other creature but they do not have any kind of mercy for human being if they are Dalits. During sacred days they feed Cow as gesture of getting blessings from the god, they feed Dog when they are in need of blessings from their dead ancestors, they feed ants, fish even a crow during Sradhh, but they don't have anything to offer to a person belong to Untouchable community. The same we find in this novel, the cruel treatment towards Dalits. And so as a showcase of unheard agony, this novel gives a platform to the dalit voice like Dukhi to convey his grief and inhumanity done to him in most radical way. In short, it is one of the best narrations of Dalit life which bring the dark side in form of worst treatment along with underprivileged education, social, political, economic and personal development.

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