



Voices from the Margins: Subalternity, Caste, and Political Oppression in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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Abstract:

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) offers a powerful portrayal of the lives of socially and politically oppressed communities in post-Independence India, set against the turbulent political backdrop of the Emergency (1975–1977). This article examines the novel through the theoretical framework of Subaltern Studies, with particular attention to caste

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oppression, political exclusion, poverty, gender inequality, state violence, and the struggle for human dignity. Through the interconnected lives of Dina Dalal, Ishvar Darji, Omprakash Darji, Narayan, and Maneck Kohlah, Mistry illustrates how socially and politically disadvantaged individuals struggle to negotiate oppressive structures that repeatedly constrain their freedom and agency. The article focuses especially on the Darjis' experience of caste discrimination, Narayan's resistance to electoral manipulation, Dina's struggle against patriarchal restrictions, and the coercive political environment of the Emergency. Drawing upon the critical perspectives of Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the study argues that Mistry transforms individual suffering into a broader critique of structural inequality. It further connects the novel to the concepts of trauma and counter-historiography, demonstrating how Mistry uses narrative to recover and foreground experiences that are often excluded from authorised accounts of Indian history. *A Fine Balance* ultimately reveals the perilous relationship between individual resilience and oppressive social structures while affirming the continuing human desire for dignity, freedom, and self-determination.

Keywords: Subaltern Studies, Caste Oppression, Political Violence, Marginalisation, Counter-Historiography.

Introduction

Indian English literature increasingly provides an important space for representing individuals and communities whose experiences have often been overlooked or excluded from dominant social and historical narratives. The literature of post-colonial India is particularly concerned with the contradictions that emerged between the promises of democracy and the continuing realities of poverty, caste hierarchy, gender discrimination, communal tension, and political inequality. The literary representation of these realities lets writers explore not only the visible consequences of social injustice but also the structures that produce and sustain it. Within this context, Rohinton Mistry occupies an important position among contemporary Indian English writers. His fiction frequently places ordinary individuals within broader historical contexts and explores how political and social forces shape their private lives.

Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, published in 1995, is one of the most significant examples of this literary approach. For this reason, the novel has been selected as the primary text for

the present study. Set largely in Bombay during the 1970s, the novel brings together four individuals whose social backgrounds appear radically different: Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow; Ishvar Darji and Omprakash Darji, two tailors from a socially oppressed caste; and Maneck Kohlah, a young student from the mountains. Their association creates a temporary household in which differences of caste, class, religion, region, and gender are negotiated through everyday experiences. The household provides a fragile space of companionship and mutual dependence; however, the security it offers is repeatedly threatened by external forces.

The title *A Fine Balance* itself evokes the precarious circumstances in which the characters struggle to sustain their lives. They are constantly required to maintain a fragile balance between hope and despair, independence and dependence, security and displacement, and dignity and humiliation. Their problems are not just personal failures. Many of the impediments they encounter are created by social institutions, political authorities, economic structures, and inherited systems of hierarchy. So, Mistry challenges the assumption that individual destiny can be understood independently of social circumstances.

The historical background of the novel is crucial to this interpretation. The Emergency declared in India between 1975 and 1977 forms an important political context for the narrative. The period was marked by the suspended civil liberties, political repression, forced evictions, censorship, and coercive population-control measures. Mistry's narrative highlights how such policies disproportionately affected people with the least economic and political power. As Young points out, although India achieved political independence, the social and economic structures inherited from colonial modernity continued to shape relations of power and marginalisation (Young 16–17). The state, which supposedly exists to protect citizens, frequently appears in the novel as an instrument of intimidation and control. This concern with historical trauma and marginalised experience is consistent with Mistry's wider

fictional engagement. In an earlier study of Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, Farook and Dastageer examine the novelist's representation of multiculturalism, identity, community, religion, politics, and social relationships.

Their discussion demonstrates that Mistry's fiction repeatedly places individual identity within a broader social and cultural environment (Farook and Dastageer 168–71). However, in *A Fine Balance*, the question of cultural plurality is extended into a deeper examination of caste, economic deprivation, gender, and political power. This trajectory becomes even more relevant in relation to Farook and Azardeen's study, "From Ethical Realism to Revolutionary Aesthetics: Trauma and Counter-Historiography in Rohinton Mistry and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o." The study identifies Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey* as narratives that foreground silenced histories and marginalised communities shaped by state authoritarianism and systemic inequalities. It argues that Mistry's humanistic realism transforms literature into an archive of testimony and challenges hegemonic versions of history (Farook and Azardeen 112-120).

The present study extends this argument by examining how subaltern identities are constructed and represented through caste, political exclusion, poverty, and institutional violence. The concept of the subaltern provides an appropriate theoretical framework for such an examination. Antonio Gramsci employed the term to describe subordinate groups whose political and social power remained limited under dominant structures. His broader discussion of hegemony is particularly useful because it demonstrates that domination does not depend exclusively upon physical force. Social institutions, cultural assumptions, political practices, and accepted hierarchies can also reproduce relations of power (Gramsci 52-55).

The concept gained renewed significance through the Subaltern Studies collective, particularly through the work of historians such as Ranajit Guha. Guha challenged elite-

centred accounts of Indian history and sought to recover the experiences and forms of political agency of peasants, workers, tribal groups, and other communities excluded from dominant historical narratives. His approach shifted attention from rulers and institutions towards the experiences of people situated at the lower levels of the social order (Guha 1–8).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak subsequently complicated the concept by asking whether the subaltern can genuinely speak within structures of knowledge and representation controlled by dominant groups. Her argument is especially useful in literary studies because it raises questions about who represents marginalised people, how their experiences are narrated, and whether representation itself can reproduce the structures it seeks to challenge (Spivak 271–313).

A Fine Balance can be productively read within those theoretical frameworks because Mistry places marginalised lives at the centre of his narrative. Ishvar, Omprakash, and Narayan experience caste-based exclusion and political violence, while Dina encounters the restrictions of patriarchy and economic vulnerability. Their experiences differ, but they share a common struggle to retain some measure of agency within systems that seek to determine their lives.

Thus, this article argues that *A Fine Balance* is not simply a narrative of suffering. It is a literary investigation of the structures that produce suffering. Mistry brings together caste, class, gender, political authority, and economic inequality to show that marginalisation rarely results from an isolated form of discrimination. Instead, different structures of power intersect and intensify one another. At the same time, his characters repeatedly attempt to resist these structures through education, migration, employment, political participation, personal independence, and human solidarity.

Subalternity and the Social Structure of Caste

The most powerful representations of subalternity in *A Fine Balance* are the experiences of Ishvar and Omprakash Darji. Their lives reveal the persistence of caste as a social structure that shapes access to occupation, education, mobility, dignity, and power. The Darjis belong to a socially oppressed caste traditionally associated with leather work. Their position is determined before they are able to make meaningful choices about their own futures.

Mistry presents caste not simply as a belief system but as a force that permeates everyday life. The humiliation experienced by Ishvar and Omprakash begins in childhood and continues to shape their lives into adulthood. Their attempt to enter the village school out of curiosity is met with hostility because their presence violates caste boundaries. The teacher's response makes it clear that education itself is treated as the privilege of dominant groups. The boys are physically punished, and the incident leaves a lasting psychological impression upon them (Mistry 110–11).

The significance of this episode extends beyond the immediate act of violence. Education is one of the principal means through which individuals can acquire social mobility. By preventing the boys from accessing education, the caste system effectively restricts their future possibilities. The teacher's violence therefore serves a broader social function: it reinforces the belief that certain forms of knowledge and opportunity belong only to certain social groups.

Ishvar's father, Dukhi Mochi, attempts to challenge this hereditary logic by encouraging his son to pursue a different occupation. Aware of the limitations imposed on his sons, he arranges for them to learn tailoring from a Muslim tailor. The decision is significant

because tailoring provides an alternative to the hereditary occupation traditionally associated with their caste. Learning a new skill becomes an attempt to create a new identity.

The Darjis' migration to Bombay is similarly motivated by the hope of escaping the restrictions of rural caste society. The city appears to offer anonymity, employment, and the possibility of reinvention. Their migration from the village to the city can therefore be understood as an attempt to resist the social determinism imposed by the caste system.

However, Mistry does not exaggerate migration. The city does not automatically erase the inequalities of the village. The Darjis remain vulnerable because their economic position is insecure and their social background leaves them exposed to exploitation. Their attempts to transform their lives are repeatedly thwarted by forces beyond their control.

Thus, the novel challenges the assumption that individual mobility alone can overcome structural inequality. Ishvar and Omprakash work hard, acquire new skills, migrate to the city, and seek employment, yet these efforts cannot fully free them from the constraints imposed by caste. Their experience demonstrates what subaltern studies seeks to foreground: the individual may possess aspirations and agency, yet that agency operates within structures that can severely restrict its possibilities.

Dina Dalal and Gendered Marginality

Although the Darjis provide the clearest representation of caste oppression, Dina Dalal faces another dimension of marginalisation. Her experience demonstrates that subalternity cannot be reduced to caste or economic class. Gender and patriarchy also determine the choices available to individuals.

Dina's early life is relatively comfortable. Influenced by her father, she dreams of becoming a doctor. Her father encourages her intellectual ambitions, but his sudden death

changes the direction of her life. Her brother Nusswan assumes authority over the family and gradually restricts her independence. Her education is interrupted, and she is expected to assume domestic responsibilities.

Dina's experience illustrates the oppressive effects of patriarchal power within the family. Unlike the Darjis, she is not denied opportunity because of caste, but her gender determines what she is permitted to do. Her brother assumes that he has the right to decide the course of her life. Her resistance therefore begins with a desire to control her own identity.

Her relationship with Rustom provides a temporary possibility of independence and companionship. More important than the marriage itself is Dina's decision to reject her brother's authority and make a personal choice. After Rustom's death, she is again confronted with economic insecurity. She refuses to return completely to the life prescribed for her and instead establishes a small tailoring business.

Dina's enterprise is significant because economic independence provides her with a means of asserting and negotiating her personal freedom. Her apartment also becomes the setting in which the four principal characters temporarily construct an alternative community. The household challenges the social divisions that separate them outside it.

However, Dina's independence remains fragile. Her economic survival depends upon a chain of relationships over which she has limited control. Her experience demonstrates that even individuals who possess certain forms of privilege may remain vulnerable within patriarchal and economic structures. Consequently, Mistry avoids presenting marginalisation as a simple binary between powerful and powerless. Social identities overlap, and an individual may experience privilege in one context and vulnerability in another.

The Temporary Community: Difference and Solidarity

The arrival of Ishvar and Omprakash at Dina's apartment, along with Maneck's presence as a paying guest, brings together four individuals from different social backgrounds. Their shared domestic life becomes one of the novel's most significant spaces of human interaction.

The household is distinctive because it temporarily suspends some of the social boundaries that govern life beyond it. Caste, religion, gender, and class do not disappear, but everyday cooperation makes them less decisive. The characters share food, work, conversation, financial difficulties, and emotional experiences. They gradually grow a sense of mutual dependence.

This representation of community connects *A Fine Balance* with Mistry's earlier treatment of multiculturalism in *Such a Long Journey*. Farook and Dastageer argue that Mistry's fiction represents cultural plurality through relationships among communities and individuals, foregrounding identity, religion, language, and social interaction (168–71). In *A Fine Balance*, however, Mistry moves beyond multicultural coexistence to address a more difficult question: can solidarity overcome structural inequality? The novel leaves this question unresolved.

The household offers emotional protection, but it cannot shield its members permanently from the political and social forces surrounding them. Its fragility is central to the novel's meaning. The characters can construct a small world of companionship, but that world remains vulnerable to forces generated by the larger society.

The household can therefore be understood as a temporary counter-space. It does not abolish caste or class, but it allows individuals to experience relationships that are not entirely

determined by those categories. Mistry's humanism is most visible here. He does not suggest that social differences are irrelevant; rather, he shows that human relationships can create moments in which those differences lose some of their power.

The Politics of Subaltern Resistance

Narayan, Ishvar's brother, represents another important dimension of subalternity: political resistance. Unlike those who seek merely to survive within the existing social order, Narayan challenges the political structures that control his village.

His desire to participate in elections is significant because voting represents a fundamental democratic right. Yet the electoral system in his village is dominated by socially powerful figures. Narayan becomes increasingly aware that formal democracy does not necessarily guarantee meaningful political participation for marginalised communities. His resistance to electoral manipulation brings him into direct conflict with the Thakur's men. The violence inflicted upon Narayan and his family is among the most disturbing episodes in the novel. Mistry presents the brutality not merely as personal revenge but as a mechanism for maintaining social and political control.

The punishment is intended to send a message to the wider community: those who challenge the established order will be made examples of. The body of the subaltern becomes a site upon which authority is violently demonstrated. Narayan's experience therefore reveals the contradiction between constitutional democracy and social reality. A person may formally possess the right to vote, yet caste and economic power can prevent that right from becoming meaningful. Political participation becomes dangerous when the existing power structure regards the political awakening of marginalised people as a threat.

From the perspective of Subaltern Studies, Narayan's resistance is important even though it ultimately fails. His failure should not be interpreted as evidence of political passivity. On the contrary, his attempt to challenge the system demonstrates agency. The fact that the dominant order must resort to extreme violence to silence him reveals the threat his resistance represents.

The Emergency and the Violence of the State

The Emergency provides the historical context within which many of the most devastating events of the novel unfold. Mistry's representation of the period shifts attention away from political institutions and towards the ordinary citizens who experience the consequences of government policies. The Emergency becomes especially significant for the people experiencing poverty because state power is exercised upon bodies, homes, occupations, and livelihoods. Eviction drives and urban demolition policies displace people who have little ability to protect themselves. The people experiencing poverty are treated not as citizens possessing rights but as obstacles to urban development.

The state's population-control campaign is another example of this unequal relationship between the state and vulnerable citizens. Population control was presented as a developmental objective, but its implementation often involved coercion and exploitation. Poor men could be persuaded or pressured through incentives and administrative force. Mistry's treatment of the state's population-control campaign is particularly significant because the policy ultimately has a direct and devastating impact on the lives of Ishvar and Omprakash. Their bodies, already marked by the violence of caste, become subject to another form of institutional control.

This connection between caste oppression and state violence is central to the novel. The Darjis are not oppressed by a single system; rather, their vulnerability results from the

intersection of caste, poverty, and political authoritarianism. The state does not create their caste identity, but its policies become especially destructive because their social position leaves them with few means of resistance. Farook and Azardeen's earlier study of Mistry's fiction is useful here because it identifies *A Fine Balance* as a text concerned with historical trauma, silenced communities, authoritarian structures, and the transformation of literature into a form of testimony (Farook and Azardeen 112-120). The present reading develops this idea by arguing that the novel's representation of state violence also functions as a form of counter-historiography.

Trauma and Counter-Historiography

Official histories often privilege political leaders, institutions, constitutional developments, and major national events. Literary narratives offer an alternative perspective by examining how such historical events were experienced by ordinary people. *A Fine Balance* does precisely this. The Emergency is not presented primarily through parliamentary debates or official documents. Instead, readers encounter it through the bodies and lives of people who have very little influence over political decision-making.

This narrative strategy transforms historical events into lived experience. The Emergency becomes visible through hunger, displacement, fear, coercive family-planning measures, homelessness, unemployment, and physical injury. Mistry therefore challenges any historical account that measures political events only through institutional achievements or failures. Counter-historiography is useful here because the novel creates an alternative archive of experience. The characters' suffering does not simply illustrate history; it challenges the way history is remembered. Their stories demand recognition as part of the nation's historical consciousness.

Trauma is central to this process. The characters carry memories of violence that shape their identities long after the immediate event has ended. Caste violence in childhood affects the Darjis' understanding of education and social status. Narayan's political resistance results in permanent consequences for his family. Dina's experiences of patriarchal control and loss influence her determination to maintain independence. Maneck's exposure to economic and social instability deepens his growing feeling of disillusionment.

Mistry's representation of trauma is therefore both personal and collective. Individual suffering reflects larger social structures. This aligns with the argument advanced by Farook and Azardeen that Mistry's ethical realism foregrounds historical trauma and marginalized voices while challenging hegemonic narratives (Farook and Azardeen 112-120). The novel's historical significance consequently lies not simply in its accuracy as a representation of the 1970s. Its deeper importance lies in its insistence that national history must include the experiences of those who suffered without possessing the power to record or control that history.

The Darjis and the Destruction of the Subaltern Body

The fate of Ishvar and Omprakash represents the most devastating expression of Mistry's critique of structural oppression. Their story begins with hope. They learn a new occupation, leave their village, migrate to Bombay, and seek employment. Their migration is driven by the aspiration to escape caste restrictions and build an independent future. Their eventual destruction is therefore particularly tragic. Their bodies become the point at which caste discrimination, poverty, and state violence intersect.

When the Darjis return to their village during the Emergency, they become victims of coercive family-planning measures. Ishvar suffers catastrophic medical consequences, eventually losing his legs. The transformation is both physical and symbolic. The man who

sought to escape a hereditary occupation and establish economic independence is reduced to dependence on others for survival. At the conclusion of the novel, the Darjis are forced into begging. Their transformation from skilled workers into disabled beggars represents the collapse of their dream of social mobility.

The tragedy should not, however, be interpreted as a simple argument that resistance is futile. Their defeat exposes the extraordinary strength of the structures confronting them. They attempt to change their occupation, location, economic position, and social identity, yet caste and political power continue to shape their lives. Mistry's treatment of their bodies also raises an important ethical question: who has authority over the body of a socially disadvantaged person? The caste system claims authority over occupation and social status, while the state claims authority over reproduction and bodily policy. The Darjis therefore experience repeated violations of bodily autonomy.

The subaltern body becomes a site of political struggle. It carries the marks of social hierarchy and state violence. Through Ishvar and Omprakash, Mistry makes abstract structures of power visible in physical form.

Maneck Kohlah and the Failure of the Modern Dream

Maneck's story introduces another dimension to the novel's examination of social exclusion. He comes from a relatively privileged background and receives an education in Bombay. Unlike the Darjis, he is not oppressed by caste in the same direct manner. Nevertheless, his experience reveals the psychological consequences of a society in which economic security and human meaning are increasingly uncertain.

Maneck initially believes that education will provide a path towards a successful future. He plans to pursue a career and eventually work abroad. His aspirations reflect the

modern dream of upward mobility through education. His relationship with Dina, Ishvar, and Omprakash changes his understanding of society. He becomes exposed to forms of poverty and discrimination that differ from his own experiences. The household enables him to understand how deeply inequality shapes the lives of those around him.

His later experiences deepen his disillusionment. His story demonstrates that social violence does not affect only those at the lowest economic level. Political instability, alienation, and the loss of meaning can affect individuals across social boundaries, although their experiences remain unequal. Maneck therefore functions as a bridge between different social worlds. Through him, the novel explores the psychological consequences of witnessing a society in which human aspirations are repeatedly frustrated.

Human Dignity and the Ethics of Survival

Despite the violence and despair that dominate much of *A Fine Balance*, the novel also includes moments of compassion. Mistry repeatedly highlights small acts of kindness, friendship, cooperation, and sacrifice. These acts do not eliminate oppression, but they provide the characters with temporary spaces of dignity. This is particularly evident in the relationship among the four central characters. Dina gives Ishvar and Omprakash employment; the Darjis contribute their labour; Maneck contributes companionship and youthful energy. Their relationship becomes reciprocal rather than purely transactional.

The prominence of these relationships lies in their resistance to the logic of social hierarchy. Outside Dina's apartment, the characters occupy very different positions. Within the household, however, they become individuals who depend upon one another.

Mistry's humanistic approach is therefore central to the novel. He does not portray the oppressed solely as statistical victims of poverty or political violence. He gives these

individuals names, histories, aspirations, fears, humour, memories, and relationships. This individualisation itself becomes a form of resistance against portraying socially disadvantaged people merely as social categories. The novel's ethical force emerges from this attention to individual humanity. The reader is encouraged not merely to acknowledge that oppression exists but to understand what oppression does to a human life.

Subalternity, Agency, and the Limits of Resistance

One of the most important conclusions to emerge from *A Fine Balance* is that subaltern characters should not be understood merely as passive victims. Narayan resists political manipulation. Ishvar and Omprakash challenge hereditary occupation. Dina resists patriarchal control. Maneck attempts to create an independent future. Their actions demonstrate agency, even when the results are tragic. This distinction is important because a purely victim-centred interpretation can unintentionally reproduce the silencing it seeks to challenge. If the oppressed are represented only as helpless victims, their capacity to think, choose, resist, and imagine alternative futures disappears.

Mistry avoids this limitation. His characters make choices, sometimes courageous and sometimes flawed. Their tragedies emerge partly because the structures surrounding them are stronger than their individual resources. This is where Spivak's question concerning the subaltern becomes particularly significant. Representation is never politically neutral. To narrate the lives of the socially disadvantaged involves decisions about whose experiences are visible and how those experiences are interpreted. Mistry's narrative does not give the reader uncomplicated access to an authentic "subaltern voice." Instead, it creates a fictional space in which the experiences of socially disadvantaged people become available for ethical and political reflection. The novel consequently participates in the larger project of challenging

dominant narratives. It asks readers to consider what national progress means when large sections of society remain excluded from its benefits.

Conclusion

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is a powerful literary exploration of subalternity, caste oppression, political exclusion, gender inequality, poverty, and human resilience. Through the interconnected lives of Dina Dalal, Ishvar Darji, Omprakash Darji, Narayan, and Maneck Kohlah, Mistry reveals that individual suffering cannot be separated from the social and political structures in which people live.

The lives of Ishvar and Omprakash reveal the enduring power of caste. Their exclusion from education, their hereditary occupation, their attempt to acquire new skills, and their migration to Bombay demonstrate their desire to escape caste-based limitations. However, their eventual physical and economic destruction exposes the difficulty of achieving genuine social mobility in a society where caste, poverty, and political authority intersect.

Narayan's resistance further reveals the limitations of formal democracy. His attempt to exercise political agency becomes an act of defiance against dominant social power. The brutal consequences of his resistance reveal the distance between democratic ideals and the realities faced by socially disadvantaged citizens. Dina's story adds gender to this complex network of marginalisation. Her struggle against familial authority and her attempt to establish economic independence demonstrate that patriarchy can restrict individual agency even when caste oppression is absent. Her relationship with the Darjis and Maneck also creates a temporary community in which Her relationship with the Darjis and Maneck also creates a temporary community in which established social hierarchies are challenged through everyday cooperation.

The Emergency provides the historical framework that brings these different forms of oppression together. State policies concerning urban development, population control, and political authority become especially destructive when directed towards citizens who lack economic and political power. Mistry thereby transforms historical events into lived experience.

The novel can consequently be read as a form of counter-historiography. Rather than presenting history through the lens of political institutions alone, Mistry reconstructs the past through the experiences of ordinary people. The suffering of the poor, the caste-oppressed, women, migrants, and the politically vulnerable becomes part of the historical record created by fiction. This dimension of Mistry's writing resonates with the argument developed in Farook and Azardeen's study of trauma and counter-historiography, in which *A Fine Balance* is examined as part of Mistry's broader engagement with silenced histories and socially disadvantaged communities.

Similarly, Mistry's engagement with multiculturalism, identified in Farook and Dastageer's earlier study of *Such a Long Journey*, provides an important background for understanding his continuing concern with community and social plurality. However, *A Fine Balance* moves beyond acknowledging diversity to a more troubling examination of whether cultural coexistence can produce equality in a society structured by caste and class. Ultimately, the "fine balance" of the novel is the fragile balance between survival and destruction. The characters struggle not simply to remain alive but to preserve a sense of self-worth in circumstances designed to deny them dignity. Their lives demonstrate that oppression is not confined to one institution or one historical moment. It is reproduced through social customs, economic arrangements, political systems, and cultural assumptions.

At the same time, the novel refuses to deny the value of human connection. Friendship, compassion, work, and solidarity provide moments of meaning even when larger structures remain oppressive. These moments do not diminish the tragic events depicted in the novel, but they prevent the novel from becoming a simple narrative of despair.

A Fine Balance therefore remains significant as a literary representation of subaltern experience because it connects individual stories with structural histories. Mistry gives narrative visibility to people whose experiences are often absent from official accounts of national progress. His characters remind readers that the history of a nation is also the experiences of those who suffered under its social and political structures. By bringing their experiences into literary consciousness, Mistry transforms private pain into a wider ethical and political question: what does freedom mean when dignity remains unequally distributed?

The enduring power of *A Fine Balance* lies in its insistence that the struggle for dignity is inseparable from the struggle against structural inequality. Its characters may fail to overcome the forces that oppress them, but their aspirations, resistance, relationships, and suffering challenge readers to acknowledge the humanity of those positioned at the margins. In this sense, Mistry's novel is not merely a historical narrative of a troubled period in India. It is a continuing reflection on the relationship between power and vulnerability, history and memory, oppression and resistance, and above all, between survival and human dignity.

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