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**THE REPRESENTATION OF SUBALTERN VOICES IN THE NOVELS OF ROHINTON  
MISTRY AND ARAVIND ADIGA**

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**Abstract**

The representation of subaltern voices in the novels of Rohinton Mistry and Aravind Adiga sheds light on the marginalized sections of society, particularly women, in postcolonial India. Both authors explore the impact of patriarchy, gender discrimination, and societal norms that restrict women's independence and agency. Through their narratives, Mistry and Adiga highlight the struggles of women who are subjected to physical, psychological, and cultural subjugation. In works like *A Fine Balance* and *The White Tiger*, the authors portray the lives of women as they navigate a male-dominated society, dealing with issues such as dowry, sexual violence, and the rigid expectations of family and community. Despite the pervasive subjugation, these female characters, such as Dina Dalal and Roopa, attempt to assert their independence, yet often face insurmountable obstacles, illustrating the harsh realities of gender inequality. The novels emphasize that the subjugation of women remains a prevalent issue even in the modern era, reflecting the complex intersection of gender, class, and power in Indian society.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Subjugation, Gender Discrimination, Dowry System, Sexual Violence, Female Independence, Stereotypes, Subaltern Voices.

**Introduction**

The second place of existence of subaltern or underclass is the post-colonial texts. A term subaltern can be referred to as subordination or subjugation. It is widely inclined to be used as the oppressed, dominated or deprived elements of the society such as women. Women have been cheated, sidelined and oppressed in one aspect to the other across all ages, religion and the society. They are mostly viewed as unholy, tender, weak, submissive, emotional, frightened and lacking adventure. The subordination of woman to male dominated society and gender discrimination have numerous dimensions, which are imposed upon the women by a given segment of the society. Women have been suffering the unspoken oppression of the patriarchal rule of the society. The consequence of such discrimination is their appalling crimes against women and they ended up losing their lives or identity.

Almost, daily, we are experiencing chilling examples of women subjugation of violence, ethnic cleansing, heinous torture, child abuse, man slaughter and a host of other human privations of the woman. Although there is the adoption of the Universal Declaration Human Rights (1948) and special covenants that ensured that women are ensured their rights against crimes, there is still no hindrance or prevention of crimes. Both physical and psychological treatment of women in the patriarchal system affects the lives of millions of women in the world, irrespective of the socio-economic and educational levels. The domestication of women may be done in an atrocious variety of forms including domestic abuse and rape, marriage off of children, and female circumcision. In India, we have nearly half our population of women, and that majority of them are deprived of human rights even at the cradle and the grave as in India, Infanticide is so rampant that anyone born with a girl is not received and welcomed by anyone. Sexual abuse and flesh trade or prostitution is a perverted vice, and it is the one that is threatening the existence of women as independent creatures.

Gender stereotyping and patriarchal domination are the most prevalent theme in the majority of the works



by the postcolonial authors. It was the magic charm of writers who were rather concerned with the issues of women in the post-colonial era when feminist consciousness was awakened in the Indian society. Yet the unconscious tension of such themes and questions is also to be found in the works of the authors who began writing long before independence such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and later to V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee, Divakaruni, Manju Kapur, M.G. Vassanji, Manorama Mathai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Uma Parameshw

The postcolonial writers mostly involve the deconstruction of the colonial domination, treachery, and duality between the powerful and powerless, superior and inferior, rich and poor, light and dark, developed and underdeveloped etc. However, they also raise their concern regarding gender inequality and discrimination and deplorable condition of the oppressed women. They work towards enabling and encouraging them and give them a voice to achieve the correct identity in the patriarchal world. Their writing involves how women of the third world countries have been chained by the patriarchal autonomy which they have to follow the traditional norms, customs, practices and religious beliefs because of powerlessness, awe, anxiety, and family pressure.

It is hard to deny the fact that even after the era of twenty first century women, they do not have their empowered identity and face the problem of gender inequality and discrimination, which is of great concern. They are still perceived as the weaker sex and being engaged in embarrassing situations during their life. The Indian society postulates that the men have the power and the cultural superiority within the society. According to Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One own*, women have been considered to be inferior over an extended period of time by the men. Men define everything in the society (Woolf 1929: 28). The institutions of culture, the social practices and religious activities discriminate against women.

This is the marginalization or oppression of women in the patriarchal society that the feminist movements have been trying to eradicate. The feminist power of 1960s and 1970s was the theorizer of a woman discourse. Their texts can lead to the better understanding of the situation of the woman. Thus, it is the root of feminism that is reformistic in character that enables the women to understand their position in a more appropriate manner. The modern world sees the awakening and awakening consciousness of women, which results in the following struggle against a tradition defined by the male dominated society. Nevertheless, it is also true that feminism is essentially a social movement that is imbedded in the social essentials and diffused in the socio-political planes, and is essentially against the predicaments of women in evil hands. (Singh 1991: 8)

The thought of the Indian society or stereotype holds that women are passive, subordinate, dependent, pure, refined and delicate and are believed to be flawed, men on the other hand are active, independent, coarse and strong. Mana, the lawgiver of the olden time, states that the father takes care of her when a child, the husband when a young woman, and the sons as a girl child when old. Woman will never deserve freedom" (Buhler 1886: 25).

Man still performs a controlling part in all spheres of life and woman is a helpless animal to entrust everything to him, beginning with her life and ending with her existence. In such a woman, her case in the male dominated society can get easily corrected. She is supposed to give birth to the children, bring them up and also take care of the household chores. A. Sinha reveals that social, economic and political exploitation usually targets women in India (Sinha 2008: xxvii).

According to Indian patriarchal culture, relationships between males and females are prone to hierarchies and deviation due to the stereotypes or the established views of how they come to realize themselves and other individuals. Male delegates peripheral space to female because he is positioned in the core of social institutions. Human nature dominates, conquers, and rationale within binary parameters of superior/inferior, normal/abnormal, culture/nature etc. assigns the less fortunate aspects to women inhabiting the margin territory of the society. They are the manifestations of the stereotyped thinking of the people who promote unfavorable judgments concerning the



opposite sex.

In essence, Society predetermines lifestyles of a woman long before she is pregnant that constitute fixed identities of a woman. It curtails her existence in dichotomous relationship of the general concept of man and women as the opposite of the masculine. There is also the development of polarization, even in the women, of building a white and black image in the ideals woman or sorceress, mother or temptress and wife or whore. A woman must be part of the desirable kind of wife or an ideal woman to be respected in society and biased towards being submissive, obedient, self-sacrificing as the mythological Sita, Draupadi and Savitri.

Rohinton Mistry and Aravind Adiga has tried to follow the impacts of modernization in the contemporary Indian social life after the Indian independence. The multifaceted and upheaval characterized post-independence era witnessed a significant amount of claiming on the part of the subaltern communities in the Indian society especially the so-called weaker sex. The issues of the women oppression have been raised by both the authors in different forms. Through their novels, they have shown how women are subjugated concerning dowry, rape, patriarchal system, traditions, prostitution, knot of family and girl child.

Mistry is the reflection of the society, culture, history, politics, psychology, tradition, religion much more in the novels. He is inclined to deal with the Parsi women characters and their life story in different spheres of society. He lets his women characters wield through the small incidences to the large incidences in his world as they struggle to possess their freedom. He introduces the micro and the patriarchal gender politics and marginalization of women at the macro levels. However, he has the propensity to put his women characters in middle or disadvantaged stand of society. Mistry seems quite effective in his role of women characters in his novels.

Rohinton Mistry has employed various middle and low social classes women in her fine balance novel Dina Dalal, Roopa, Zenobia, Ruby, Leela, Rekha, Mrs. Shroff, Mrs. Aban Kohlah, Mrs. Gupta and Shirin Aunty. It is not only that he has illuminated our society about how women have been oppressed and marginalized but he has also shown things change in the world of women by creating female characters that are not afraid to go against the norms and regulations of the traditional society. He has been tracking the development among women that was previously subservient to a progressive one. The protagonist of the book Dina Dalal is raised in a strict vigilance of her father. But soon her father dies and her brother Nusswan receives an opportunity to be the head of family. He exhibits a widespread trait of attempting to assert his dominance and manhood over his sister by asserting his domination over her. He abuses and hates Dina, and desires to mold her in the manner he desired as the male dominated world has granted him the authority to do so. Nusswan was no prospective child because the start and Dina is a smart and intelligent child but she has no other option but to obey him as he becomes the head of the family and the legal guardian of the child Dina following the death of their father. The author has shown the stereotypical negative role of an Indian male that dominates females. The first step that Nusswan as the head of the family takes is to cut down on the number of hired helps. Even his mother (Mrs. Shroff) informs him, she does not know who would clean the house. My hands and legs are not working as they should. He responds on the spot: Dina is a young girl, she is full of life. It will serve her right, it will show her how to care about a house" (AFB: 18). In this instance Mistry gave the complete portrait of the Indian man who always assumes that the females can only do one thing which is, taking care of the house. It goes without saying that Nusswan is reiterating the excuse of our society which dictates that a woman must live within the frames that the male constructs. Nusswan has the identical main focus as Rising of Dina. Dina is no longer in a position to have the chance of staying at homes of her friends during the holidays as they can only visit her with his consent. She is even prevented by Nusswan who dictates her hairstyle, clothes, and even schooling. He becomes so authoritative to the point of deciding whether Dina was able to continue her studies or not and she had no choice but to give up her studies. Therefore, after the death of Mrs. Shroff, Nusswan comes to a conclusion that it was no use Dina going to school (AFB: 26). The cancellation of her work on the bases report card aggravates Dina and she strikes back, "you do make me clean and scrub all them all the time, I can not study at least an hour a day! What do you expect?" (AFB:26). Dina is an aggressive young girl who does not submit dictation of her brother



without causing loud protests. Even after Dina brawls and shouts at Nusswan, he will do anything to hit her and the ruler in order to punish her so that she can learn to respect him as it is his duty. Dina is forced to a dead end career of a maid. Civility Nusswan is not very distant in his patriarchal manner, we may find the following in the novel:

“You have always habit of blurting whatever comes into your loose mouth. But you are no longer a child. Someone has to teach you respect.” He sighed, “It is my duty, I suppose,” and without warning he began slapping her. He stopped when a cut opened her lower lip.” ... . He stepped back and flung a mugful of cold water at her from the bucket. Shivering she stared at him, her nipples stiffening. He pinched one, hard, and she flinched. “Look at you with your little breasts starting to grow. You think you are a woman already. I should cut them right off, along with your wicked tongue.” (AFB: 23- 24)

Mistry puts great emphasis on the fact that the women in the Indian society are marginal. The role of a man is something Indian community expects all male sons to play since their childhood. This system of the male dominance not only dictates the male action, but the female action as well. This is a highly accepted and a socially acceptable obedient and non-demanding woman. Neither is she expected to be outside the protection and custody of a man.

The patriarchalism society does not have a biological predisposition that leads Nusswan to be superior to Dina but the effect of the mentioned socio-cultural and economic determinants leads to him assuming the role. Neither is it in-built in the male to order, control and have his way but he had internalized his image in the society that surrounded him. Mistry demonstrates that oppression of a woman is an ordinary phenomenon not only among the uneducated, but among the educated members of the population such as urban. He proposed that we are all oppressed by outside and at home too. Dina enrolls in free concert classes in which she falls in love with Rustumji. Nusswan assisted her with many in-offers but she rejected them as she has to marry Rustumji against her brother. Dina and Rustom are happy after the marriage but this happiness does not last long and Rustom dies after an accidental event due to a bus hit just after the third year of her marriage. She attempts to spin the situation to the best of her life by becoming independent but she is forced to go back to Nusswan. Nusswan begins to act repressive and she is forced to cook, laundry knives etc. But the temptation to be free again, results in Dina desiring to get out of the house of returning to prison once again and receive her freedom. She is no longer a wife and Nusswan proposes to her a couple of times but she declines to get married as soon as her husband dies. Nusswan accuses Dina by telling him:

“Do you know how fortunate you are in our community? Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days you would have had to be a good little Sati and leap onto your husband’s funeral pyre, be roasted with him.” (AFB:52)

“Dina Dalal is a symbol of a ‘new woman’ who has a voice to speak as one morning, Nusswan after swallowing his last gulp of tea, said her “I’m very late today, Dina. Please wash my things” (AFB: 19). Her reply was rebellious as she answered back, “I am not your servant! Wash your own plates! Weeks of pent-up resentment came gushing”. You said we would each do our own work! All your stinking things you leave for me! Listen to the little tigress”” (AFB: 19).

“Even after husband’s death, Dina displays a unique sense of dignity and courage which surprises her brother also. As she is Unable to tolerate the oppressive behavior of Nusswan, she leaves her brothers home for the second time to get settled in the rented flat of her late husband. Nusswan challenges her, “Let her go if she wants. I would just love to see how she supports herself”” (AFB:52).

In this case, Misty is the symbol of Nusswan the compound of Indian male who still believes that a woman cannot make her own decisions, and the choice of Dina shows her to be of independent spirit and desires to live her



own life without becoming a liability of any person. The as a symbol of new women is confronted by Dina who attempts to make a living by utilizing her tailoring talents, her argument with the man dominated society. She hires Ishvar and Om who run her tailoring business and Maneck as a paying guest who helps her cover her financial needs. Mistry makes it very clear that the first thing that women should be empowered is being able to be economically independent.

Dina is eager in seeking her freedom and to be emancipated out of this male dominated society. She resorts to escaping the shackles of her brother despite her pressure and poverty. She started living once again with her dead husband by the name of Darab and Shirin aunty. Nevertheless, the aunty of Darab and Shirin passed away quite soon. Luckily, this time, Dina is all alone, she can travel in this world and confront the cruel reality of the life in male dominated society. Dina lived in a small apartment in her dead husband.

She starts her journey of gaining liberation of male dominated society where she is being humiliated and being oppressed as a woman. She turns to the help of Zenobia, her former school friend who happens to be a hair dresser. Dina familiarizes herself with the essentials to make hair cuts of children with the help of Zenobia, she on her recommendations becomes a convenient haircutter of the children of her friends. Nevertheless, the move by Dina, which is not stereotypical, does not work since those who are obliged to adhere to dogma do not want their children to have their hair cut in their homes. Despite the fact that Mistry can enable Dina to go against the patriarchy but it limits her within its own boundaries as he writes in the novel that: Some did give her the heads of their children. But you have to do it out of door, they said. Dina refused. There were limits to which she could go. She was a house children stylist and not a street corner pavement barber (AFB: 59).

The help of her friend Zanobia helps her get tailoring contract with Mrs. Gupta and fight the greedy nature of capitalism of profit. She was night and day, trying to make a living, sending the rent, electricity bills and to make an independent successful woman, she started feeling the damage in her eyes, as the doctor informs her, quit the eye-strain or I will be blind (AFB:64). Through the help of Zanobia, she manages to join two tailors on the contract she acquired by Mrs. Gupta.

Dina does not want to lose her freedom as a tailor; however, when her eyes get weak she hires two tailors Ishvar and Om who come to her in her apartment and takes Maneck Kohlah as her payment guest. Once again, she does not lose her hope and creates her own world. The intervention of the males who threatens her at every turn takes away her independence and freedom once again as she is impatiently made by her rent collector without being easily discouraged. She makes it as Ishvar and Om abandon her life. Two tailors Ishvar and Om go to their village to get married but unfortunately they are entangled into the twenty points program by Indira Gandhi where Ishvar loses his leg to vasectomy. However, she is forcefully carried along by rent collector into the flat and relocated to the same shackled oppressive world where she is attempting to escape to acquire freedom. Finally, but not the least is her inability to leave behind Ishvar whose leg is amputated and Om who is castrated despite being deprived of her freedom by the male dominated society. Nandini Bhauto Dewnarain has said of Dina as:

“This is where Dina’s fight for independence ends. It would seem that beyond the sheer intensity of her character, Dina represents some of the realities of the condition of women in the subcontinent. As a woman, as a widow, Dina’s life exists at the function of too many margins. The novels choice of social realism does not allow for a fairy- tale transcendence of material conditions. Though she is fiery, energetic and fiercely independent, Dina’s feminist struggles are thwarted by the same kind of social predetermination that affects the livelihood of her tailor friends.” (Dewnarain 2007: 106)

This becomes highly speculative and debatable when Dina goes back to the house of Nusswan when all her expectations are shattered and she falls into the hands of the patriarchy which she is not supposed to have. There is a possibility that she received a bit of bread and butter again to continue living and feed herself. Acting in the novel



Dina is the kite without any strings and is free to fly in the sky, yet continuously, with a jerk of patriarchy that has the string in its hands. Nilufer E. Bharucha writes:

“Dina as a young girl, a married woman and a dependent widow, constantly upsets the balance of patriarchy and has to pay for it in her truncated education, her husband’s death, the loss of her tailors, her home, ultimately her much prized independence. Dina, however, is a fighter and after every loss of balance, she clambers onto the knife-edge again to once more achieve that ever-elusive fine balance.” (Bharucha 2003: 166)

As Gita Vishwanath writes:

“Dina Dalal’s ultimate return to her brother’s household prioritizes the norm of the male headed family. This defeatist end constructed by a male writer for Dina is of significance in feminist analysis. The single woman, imaged as helpless and incapable must therefore be restored to her ‘rightful’ place i.e. within the family structure.” (Dodiya 1998: 41)

In his novel *A Fine Balance*, Misty has come closer to the social, cultural and economic processes that have confined the phenomenon of daughter dislike in the society. One cannot help but question after reading the novel whether girls are the ones who hold any of the status, respect, recognition and any place into our so called civilized society. It is instituted in traditions and customs, based on which females were taught to be submissive to the male influence in all aspects of existence. This mindset begins at home and restrictions toward a girl are imposed at the tender age. The author seems to be the eyewitness of the fact that we want the girl to give in all the requirements of mental independence and personal worth. Instead of improving on the self-worth of the girl, as well as the bravery to live as a personality, we extinguish it.

The need to treat the woman right is manifested by the author who knows that it is a son-worshipping society that does not tolerate the daughters. In fact, it is noted that son preference is influencing women in majority of the countries particularly in Asia. Its cost can be between fetal or female infanticide and lack of concern of the girl child when compared to her brother in respect to basic needs like nutrition, basic health and education. A number of women in India will willingly get rid of the pregnancy when they are giving birth to a daughter and will take advantage of their pregnancies when they are giving birth to a son, sex selection through genetic testing is a highly profitable business in India, more so in the northern regions of India. According to a study conducted on the amniocentesis tests conducted in one of the largest hospitals in Bombay, it was found that 95.5 per cent of the females fetuses found were aborted compared with a very low percentage of the male fetuses.

Mistry does not only encompass oppression of Parsi family women, but also of a Hindu family, and sidelining of women in it. Mistry also makes the main point of her narration a character Roopa, of the low caste (chamaar). Roopa is an Indian woman who does not express affection and love to daughters but she has a particular care and love to her son. The three other daughters of her pass away as infants, there is no explanation given in the reading but the fourth one was a male and she takes good care of him. The inquiry is on what happened to the three infant female children to kill them. Do they get murdered due to family pressure Roopa? Or they die due to lack of care.? Mistry narrates of Roopa who shows particular affection and love to a male child as she had not shown to a female child:

“Then they had a son, and the families rejoiced greatly. The child was called Ishvar, and Roopa watched over him with the special ardour and devotion she had learned was reserved for male children. She made sure he always had enough to eat. But for this child, she does not hesitate to steal either.... After her milk went dry, Roopa began nocturnal visits to the cows of various landowners... She took only a little from each cow; thus, the owner would not sense a decrease in the yield. When Dukhi saw the milk in the morning, he



understood. If he awoke in the night as she was leaving, he said nothing; and lay shivering till she returned.” (AFB: 97)

The reason why Roopa is more concerned with the male child than the female child is actually how the Indian society has been mentally oriented, or in our civilized society, which has in most cases, played up to their oppression in the process of undertaking such activities. She is not robbing milk to a girl child but a male child "Her adventure of visiting the cows of the different landowners at night" (AFB: 97). Moreover, this also holds true in our society, when a male child is born, it is being celebrated by sweets and when the child born by a female is not celebrated. It can be observed how the family of Dukhi just before the birth of three daughters succeeded Omprakash. Two survived. Their names were Leela and Rekha. No gifts were made out of sweets" (AFB: 159).

By depicting two sisters Leela and Rekha, and their brother Om, Misty finds gender discrimination and marginalization. Omprakash as a boy is sent to go and train tailoring and Leela and Rekha are confined to the house. They did not go to learn anything and are confined to do household works. Attention is paid to Om yet nobody cares about Rekha and Leela. This oppression and discrimination grounds them down to the point of anger when their brother comes. Since Radha is a woman, Mystery shows that it is women themselves who impose the premise of marginalization of women because it is witnessed that Radha as a woman was more interested with child of male sex rather than female sex:

“No one paid attention to Leela and Rekha if their brother was in the house. It started as soon as he stepped in the door. “Look at my child! How thin he has become! “ complained Radha. “Is your uncle feeding you or not? .... But she used the excuse to lavish on him special treats like cream, dry fruits, and sweetmeats, bursting with pleasure while he ate. . . . Roopa, too, relished the sight of her lurching, munching grandson.” (AFB: 141-142)

The fact that the two females are not ever served to consume any dry fruits, lassi to drink, cream to eat, is also evident. Even, in the instance they are alone to cry and they have no one who is concerned about their feeling and tears. The men in the real world have always been the focus of all the power since the beginning of time and, in fact, without the women, men are nothing. When a male child is born, there is always pride and joy in all classes and castes in India and when a female child is born, there is sadness due to the male dominance within the society.

In India, women are treated as commodity when they are married as P Selvam claims in this connection where once they are married, they are treated as the property of their husbands, which they can abuse and bully. They are beaten by their husbands and in the instance that daughters are born they are instructed to conceal the young baby and strangle them, poison them or even starve them to death (Selvam, 2006: 69). Misty has narrated such domination, as to be, in his novel:

“The news of a second son created envy in upper- caste homes where marriages had also taken place around the time Dukhi and Roopa were wed, but where the women were still childless or waiting a male issue. It was hard for them to be resentful—the birth of the daughters often brought them beatings from their husbands” families. Sometimes, they were ordered to discreetly get rid of the new born. Then they had no choice but to strangle the infant with their swaddling clothes, poison her, or let her starve to death.” (AFB: 99-100)

The son preference is not just the matter of concern through which the women oppression takes place. An abandoned infancy, malnourished, no schooling, no security, respect and security, beat and raped, all this has been illuminated by the Mistry. The world that exists is then the one that oppresses and discriminates a woman, through sexual violence. Mistry has taken in his works, the issue of sexual violence and street security of women and in their own house; hopelessness to adjust with the contemporary state of the erosion of female security and safety. As the



novel unfolds, we understand how such women are being sexually exploited and harassed in the hands of male. Rape or sexual harassment is a weapon of oppressing women. There is no safe place that the woman can go. Justice is proud of being fair to everyone except the truth yet when it comes to rape or harassment; the truth tells differently. The rape or the sexual harassment may occur in any place such as the family that may take the abuser as marital rape or incest and the society where the woman may become a victim of any abuser. The new issue that worries women these days is sexual harassment at the work place. Employers carry out sexual favours on their female co-workers or sub-ordinates, sometimes promise them a promotion or other career upgrading or simply make the working environment unbearable and unpleasant. Women who fail to take such unwanted sexual advances are likely to face the danger of being sidelined or even fired.

Rohinton Mistry set aside the way women are not even liberated at sacred places and in so called holy persons like Dina is not interested in going to fire temple because of the vulgar remarks of the priest Dustoor Framji to all the young girls. This has caused her to be annoyed to an extent she avoids spending time with the fire temple since she has been irritated by the manner of the priest Dustoor Framji since she was a child. The incidence lays bare and makes it far more absurd when she is brought to fire temple by her brother who is strict and disciplined to pray so that she can be enlightened. Nevertheless, the whole process sounds ridiculous and frightening to Dina who does not like the touching, hugging and patting of the priest. Mistry seems to sneer at Nusswan, priest and religious dogma as:

“Dina squirmed in his grasp as he patted her head, rubbed her neck, stroked her back and pressed himself against her. . . while she bowed before the sanctum, he travelled along the outer wall hung with pictures with various Dustoors and high priests. He glided from display to display, stroking the garlands. . . Then, from the vessel of ashes, placed in the sanctorum doorway, he smeared punch on his forehead, another bit across the throat and undid his two shirt buttons to rub fistful over his chest, like talcum powder.” (AFB: 20)

Dina, hence, believes that it is harassment in her childhood and even in her adulthood. She is upset with the manner in which he treats her and she is not ready to be in his presence when she gets married.

Though this is not the reality of the fire temple, Mistry also eloquently opens our eyes to the fact that women are oppressed and marginalized even in these places like the court where most educated people are working and the court is also called the protector of rights and privileges. At the court gate, a crowd of lawyers assembles around Dina Dalal and flaunts their degrees and asks her to hire them as her lawyer. Some of them make certain advances to her which are humiliating and harassing as it is narrated by Mistry the following way:

“In the crush, a hand squeezed her bottom, while another passed over her breasts. “You rogues! You shameless rascals! She struck out of her elbows, and managed to kick a shin or two before they scattered. She wished she had her pagoda parasol with her - what a lesson she would teach them. Her hands were shaking, and she had to concentrate hard to place one foot in front of the other without losing her step.” (AFB: 560)

An untouchable woman is not just Dina, but a selfless and soulless object to have been used. The high caste guard is so certain of the social disapproval that a tame community woman can be visited and bullied by watchman such as untouchable women:

“One shout from me and they will come running.” “What?” She saw his smile disappear suddenly.

“I only have to shout, and the owner and his sons would be here at once. They would strip you and whip



you for stealing.”

“She trembled, and the smile returned to his face. “Don’t worry, I won’t shout.” She fastened the mouth of the sack, and he continued, “After whipping you, they would probably show you disrespect, and stain your honour. They would take turns doing shameful things to your lovely soft body.” .... He led her cringing to the cot and ripped open her top three buttons. She crossed her arms in front... ‘Take off your clothes’... ‘I beg you, let me go’... ‘I only have to shout once’.” (AFB: 99)

The dowry is a curse to women and the society. It is one of the oppressive and alienating instruments of women. Dowry is a real vice on our society that is quite embedded. The Indian society has rendered the life of women pathetic due to the marriage price. Dowry is referred to as property ornaments, money or any other form of wealth that the man or his family possesses when the wife or her family is married. Indian marriage is a practice and a problem referred to as dowry. The dowry giving was meant to help a newly married couple to establish themselves in their marriage life with ease. It has been turned into a commercial undertaking to which it is the monetary aspects that are overvalued to the personal merit of the bride. Dowry system has equally spawned a lot of socio-economic problems that have very dire consequences like bride burning, harassment and physical tortures to the female and their family where a female is treated as a subordinate. In 1961, Govt. of India has enacted Dowry Prohibition Act that was later amended in 1985 to stop such menace. Nevertheless, in most of India, despite this Act, there is the issue of dowry in terms of give and take. In India, dowry violence is a growing trend. Burning of women with underestimated dowry known by their in-laws is the most brutal of bride burning. Even an approximation of this is given, the majority of such cases are being claimed as accident burns in the kitchen or disguised as suicide. The culture of dowry is used to oppress women in the Indian society.

The curse of dowry system has made poor parents miserable lives of girls. The poor parents, though in a position not to get rich dowry, can not marry their daughters to right young boys easily or cannot at all. Due to this evil, thousands and thousands of poor girls are made to spend unmarried life. The birth of the daughter in the house raises a lot of concern among the parents and they would prefer infanticide. There are even the instances when the victims and their family are compelled to borrow and spend the rest of their life in the debt. As a result of this system, a good number of young women finally commit suicide.

It is an evils of social life that stifles and sidelines women and this is what Mistry and Aravind Adiga have refuted at once. The two authors have shown how dowry becomes a curse to the women and their family. Many young women commit suicide simply because they are not able to afford dowry as three sisters of Maneck in *The Fine Balance*. We get to know that Avinash has three older sisters. The three sisters do not have dowry amount since their father is too poor, hence, hanging to rescue their parents the embarrassment of not having married daughters. A photograph of them hanging on a wall features in the newspaper when their brother Avinash a college student union chairman who is the only earner of the family is killed in the police custody. The author narrates the destiny of a poor old man who is undergoing vasectomy simply because he needs money to pay dowry to his granddaughter, the same reason why their grandfather underwent the operation was because of the cash bonus and gifts. The old man was supposed to assist the granddaughter with dowry (AFB: 452). But he passes away as a result of the same operation. This is the demeaning aspect of dowry as described by Mistry in the Indian society. He brings out the injustices made to the women, investigates the marginalization of the woman in the maledominated society.

Another example of dowry as curse to women is seen in this when Beggar master has provided the information about the unknown mother of Shanker who is Nosey, a beggar woman and she said that:

“...when she was born, her drunken father had slashed off her nose in his rage, disappointed with the mother for producing a daughter instead of a son. The mother had nursed the wound and saved the newborn’s life, though the father kept saying let her die, her ugly face was the only dowry in store for her, let her die.



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Because of his continuing harassment and persecution, the child was sold into the begging profession.” (AFB: 523)

This is an indication of the influence of dowry system on the individuals, and ought to serve as the means to alienate the women of the society we live in.

Aravind Adiga has also addressed the problem of dowry as a remedy on the women and their family that borrowed money and held in debt as long as they breathe or they suffer. Adiga with the main character of the novel *The White Tiger* criticize the excessive cost of dowry system, which is popular in India. The bride parents are a major loser due to hosting the massive party and the issue on how to handle money to satiate the appetite of the bridegroom family. Balram family has to take a loan to cousin in the form of money to pay the dowry of landlord. They have sold themselves off to landlord in order to pay dowry. Balram, therefore, has to leave school and go and work at tea shop. As Balram narrates:

My cousin-sister Reena got hitched off to a boy in the next village. Because we were the girl’s family, we were screwed. We had to give the boy a new bicycle, and cash and a silver bracelet, and arrange for a big wedding - which we did. (*The White Tiger*:43)

Another case of dowry victim in the novel *Between the Assassinations* is also depicted where the dowry system does not enable the person to get married. The dowry curse is unveiled in the *Between the Assassinations* story of Jayamma on *Between the Assassinations* on Day Five: Valencia (To the Crossroad). Jayamma is the daughter of the ninth out of nine girls. Now she cooks to the advocate and her life has been second none. Adiga, who tells her deplorable story, writes that:

“Her father had saved enough gold only for six daughters to be married of; the last three had to stay barren virgins for life.... For forty years she’d been put on one bus or the other, sent from one town to the next to cook and clean in someone else’s house. To feed and fatten someone’s children.” (*Between the Assassinations* 2009:157-58)

Through the character of Jayamma, Adiga has brought out clear that dowry is a social evil or institution which women must endure and passive in the male dominated society in which women cannot enjoy their place and their right to equality in the society. They are forced to be suppressed and subordinate in this social system.

To this evil in the society, thousands and thousands of poor girls fall in the hands of Aravind Adiga. The poor parents are unable to arrange a costly dowry, they have difficulties with the marriage of their daughters to young boys, on the contrary, they are unable to marry them at all. Birth of daughter in the house is also a matter of high concern among the parents and they would opt to commit infanticide.

These power relations have been internalized so as to make women subordinate and marginalized. Men were constantly treating or observing female body as an object and women are introduced to be to others-to men. The male gaze is also applied to the value of a woman since at times she is also trying to be an object of the masculine desire. Women are to themselves other because they are willed and measured in terms of masculine point of view that tries to keep women personified. As Balram recalls that:

“I had stopped the car at a traffic signal; a girl began crossing the road in a tight T-shirt, her chest bobbing up and down like three kilograms of *brinjals* in a bag. I glanced at the rearview mirror – and there was Mr. Ashok, his eyes also bobbing up and down.” (TWT: 199)

Phallogocentric urge coins feminine bodies and objectifies the female body, which is male-gazed. The women today are mostly forced by their parents, husbands or boyfriends to prostitution or an adverse economic and social



situation. They are also enticed into prostitution even by the mail-order bride agencies that assure them of getting them a spouse or getting them a job overseas. But after this they find themselves in slavery as was the case in brothels illegally where they are abused physically. They often get a very low percentage of what the client pays the pimp or the owner of the brothels, it is quite clear that once having been sucked up into this system they can hardly get out of the same and end in a very vulnerable position. This renders prostitutes very hard to emerge out and seek protection, in case they become victims of rape or they are ready to leave brothels, believing that prostitution is a crime in most of the nations.

In the novel, *The White Tiger*, Adiga has revealed the prostitution where a woman is nothing but a sexual object of the man. One of the protagonists, Balram is the one who informs the Chinese premier Wen Jiabo that in this flesh trade, all types of women are availed by foreigners as well as local women that are available in most cities in India. Adiga in his novel *The White Tiger* had stated that prostitution is another dark side of India of light. Majority of the women in the larger cities are forced to engage in this profession as a result of poverty or other reasons. Bangalore, in Dhanbad and in Delhi there are red light areas where one can strike a price with these women and whether it is High class or not so. Virgin or non-virgin?" (TWT: 227). The affluent individuals of Delhi more so the type of the gold-haired ladies (TWT: 232). Forgery also exists in this racket as the suppliers provide a woman with dyed golden hair in order to charge her the most money. The Nepali, Ukrainian and poor labourers of the village who are hired in the construction of mall permit their women to indulge in prostitution.

In the novel, *The Ministers* is a crony of corrupted Mr. Ashok a master of Balram and introduces him to a whore who is hopefully a Russian but is portrayed as an American actress with the name Kim Basinger. Mr Ashok is not ready but he was forced by the sidekick of the minister to do so out of fun. Balram is an assistant and he is ready to possess such girls with golden hair. Delhi has some element of culture that in some way Balram observes in seeing the streets that she sees so many painted women with whom men pay some form of price somewhere in the middle of the traffic. Even Balram himself try to get a prostitute involved as he recounts the incident pathetically as he describes the conditions of women and he writes:

“She gave me a big smile- I knew it well it was the smile a servant gives a master... I climbed on top on her- and held her arms behind her head with one hand. Time to dip my beak in her. I let the other hand run through her golden curls.” (TWT: 234- 235)

Prostitution is something of men who invented it in order to satisfy their sexual urge. The dominance of men is inhumane to the female prostitutes.

Not only have both the authors raised voice on subjugation of women in our civilization, but have actually brought change to the world of women by making the female characters to break the norm and create a ruckus by breaking the rules of the old order society. The patriarchal culture that has prevailed in India has belittled and debilitated the Indian mind so much that men feel that no woman is deserving an education, work, write and other options as well. Men identified themselves as independent and superior. There is no doubt that a man will always be the breadwinner and the woman is supposed to share whatever the man has been doing with his sweat and blood. The world that man was in appeared to be able to live without a woman.

A close look at work reveals that we live in a society that is nowhere near being gender fair and the challenging aspect regarding women. The woman of today is leaving the minds of the male dominated society straining and a woman must have tensions and troubles when she makes her unique as a being. Nevertheless, it is not entirely too bad since the authors also acknowledge that the women empowerment is the new reality of the Indian society. Even though social mobilization has changed the attitude of the people towards the women subjection yet male dominated society employs other tools to subjugate women in the form of sexual assault, dowry, prostitution, rape, kill a female foetus (infanticide) and even pornography.



## Conclusion

Both Rohinton Mistry and Aravind Adiga offer a nuanced critique of post-independence Indian society through their vivid portrayals of the marginalized and the subaltern. Mistry's exploration of the Parsi identity crisis and the caste-based discrimination in *A Fine Balance* provides a compelling look at the challenges faced by minority communities in India. Similarly, Adiga's *The White Tiger* and *Between the Assassinations* raise important questions about the socio-political systems that perpetuate caste and religious inequality. Through their works, both authors highlight the pervasive issues of class, caste, and religious discrimination, showing how these factors shape the lives of the marginalized. By giving voice to the subaltern, Mistry and Adiga expose the deep-seated inequalities that persist in Indian society, offering a powerful critique of the systems that continue to oppress the marginalized. Their novels remind us of the importance of addressing these issues and striving towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

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