

POVERTY AND POWER: A SOCIO-LITERARY ANALYSIS OF OLIVER TWIST AND UNTOUCHABLE IN THE LIGHT OF THE UN'S SDG-1

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Abstract—This study focuses on poverty as reflected in real life and in literature. It looks at how two famous novels, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens and *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, show the poor people suffering in two different cultures—England and India. They show that poverty is more than just not having money; it also brings shame, pain, and lack of dignity. Each novel is set in a different place and time—*Oliver Twist* in 19th-century England and *Untouchable* in 20th-century India. But the pain of poverty is the same. Both stories show how poor people are treated as if they are less than human. Oliver is treated like a criminal because he is poor. Bakha is treated harshly even worse than animals because of his caste.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To explore how poverty is shown in both real life and fiction through the selected novels.
2. To compare how Dickens and Anand portray the struggles of poor people in their societies. To link the novels' messages to SDG-1 and the global effort to end poverty

LITERATURE REVIEW

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens shows the hard life of orphans and poor children in 19th-century England. Oliver experiences many painful situations. Dickens uses Oliver's story to criticize the English social system. Dickens exposes flawed systems as workhouses and unfair courts. Dr. John Bowen observed that Dickens used powerful emotions and lifelike situations to highlight social injustice. His research shows that Dickens helped readers feel sympathy for poor children and raised awareness about the need to improve the workhouse system.

In *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand tells the story of Bakha, a young boy from a low caste in India. Bakha is treated with hate and disgust by others. Anand writes about the pain of caste-based discrimination and poverty. The scholar Meenakshi Mukherjee found that Anand gave voice to the untouchables and helped readers understand their silent pain. Her outcome proves that Anand's novel raised social awareness and respect for lower caste people. The scholar Meenakshi Mukherjee notes that Anand presents a deep human picture of the pain and humiliation faced by lower castes in society.

PROBLEM DEFINITION AND STATEMENT

Poverty is a crucial problem in the world nowadays. Millions of people worldwide lack basic needs like food, water, shelter, education, or jobs. Literature reflects what happens in the real world. Writers often focus on the life of poor people to let others understand their daily struggles and hidden pain. This paper will discuss two novels—*Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable*—that show poverty in two different societies, in

two different centuries. These books help readers feel the pain and suffering of the poor. They also help us think deeply about how literature can be a voice for the voiceless.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper will compare the two novels and study how they present poverty. It will use both real-world data and literary analysis. It will include facts from the United Nations about poverty and its effects. Two theories will be used:

1. Marxist theory to study class differences and the conflict between rich and poor in *Oliver Twist*.
2. Postcolonial theory to highlight caste and power struggles in *Untouchable*.

The study will focus on the main characters, their pain, and the way society oppresses them. It will also look at how the authors use their stories to raise awareness about poverty and injustice.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The research explores that poverty affects people in different ways such as no money, pain, and how people are dehumanised. In *Oliver Twist*, Oliver suffers because the system does not support poor children. He is lonely and consequently is pushed into crime. In *Untouchable*, Bakha is poor and also faces discrimination because of his caste. He is not allowed to touch others, or even get water from public wells.

Both characters suffer because of systems that were built to benefit only the rich and powerful. The novels affect the readers to sympathise with the poor and stand against this unfair treatment. This research highlights that poverty must be addressed in both real life and in education. Reading such novels should be encouraged, as they help us learn about compassion, justice, and humanity.

I. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Poverty has existed across centuries, and despite social progress, it continues to shape human lives in deep and complicated ways. It affects survival, but it also affects how people see themselves and how they are seen by others. When a person lives in poverty, the impact is not limited to income or material lack. It influences confidence, security, belonging, and the ability to imagine a different future. Over time, poverty can become so normal that it is no longer questioned. It reduces not only resources, but also visibility and voice.

Public discussions often describe poverty as a personal failure, suggesting that individuals simply lack effort or responsibility. Such explanations ignore the larger structures that determine opportunity long before a person is able to choose. This study approaches poverty as something produced within social, economic, and cultural systems. Access to education, healthcare, safety, and protection is not equally distributed. For many children, poverty is not a result of their actions; it is a condition into which they are born.

Structural inequality operates quietly. It appears in institutions, traditions, and everyday practices that limit movement and possibility. Children raised in poverty often inherit restricted access to learning, nutrition, and stability. These limitations shape expectations early in life. Over generations, disadvantages can appear natural, even when it is socially constructed.

Current global data confirms the scale of the issue. The United Nations reports that more than 700 million people still live in extreme poverty. It defines poverty as more than low income, describing it as “a denial of choices and opportunities” and a violation of dignity. This definition is important because it shifts responsibility away from individuals and toward systems. When access, safety, and recognition are repeatedly denied, poverty shapes identity itself.

The introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 reflects this broader understanding. SDG-1 aims to end poverty “in all its forms everywhere,” recognizing that poverty includes lack of education, healthcare, protection, and social voice. This multidimensional view connects strongly with literary representation, where poverty is shown not in statistics but in lived experience.

Literature does not measure poverty; it makes it visible. Through narrative and character, readers encounter hunger, fear, humiliation, and endurance in concrete situations. Stories allow the reader to inhabit emotional realities that numbers cannot express. In this sense, literature preserves the human dimension of inequality.

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens presents poverty through the life of a child raised within institutional authority. The workhouse offers survival but not care. Critics such as John Bowen and Philip Collins have argued that Dickens exposes a system in which discipline replaces sympathy and crime results from social neglect rather than character. Similarly, in *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand portrays caste-based exclusion through the experiences of Bakha. His suffering is determined by birth, not behaviour. Meenakshi Mukherjee and M. K. Naik notes that Anand’s realism reveals humiliation in ordinary daily life, making injustice appear routine rather than exceptional.

Although Oliver’s world is shaped by class and Bakha’s by caste, the emotional consequences are strikingly alike. Both characters experience hunger, fear, isolation, and the erosion of dignity. Through these child-centred narratives, poverty is shown as socially produced and psychologically damaging.

This study therefore understands poverty as a structural and global condition. By reading these two novels together, it examines how different systems create similar patterns of exclusion and inherited disadvantage. Literature, in this context, becomes more than artistic expression; it becomes a space where human experience is preserved and social indifference is questioned.

1.2 Background of the Study

Poverty is often discussed as if it were a recent crisis, yet it has accompanied human societies for centuries. What changes over time is not its existence, but its form. Industrial growth, colonial expansion, global trade, and technological progress have altered the structure of societies, but they have not removed inequality. In many historical moments, development has existed alongside deprivation. Prosperity for some has frequently meant vulnerability for others.

This uneven development suggests that poverty cannot be understood only as economic shortage. It is closely related to how societies organise authority, labour, property, and status. When access to education, protection, and opportunity is distributed unequally, inequality becomes embedded within everyday life. Over time, such inequality appears normal. It is accepted as part of the social order rather than recognised as injustice.

One of the most troubling aspects of poverty is its continuity across generations. Children do not choose the conditions into which they are born. Yet birth often determines access to schooling, healthcare, nutrition, and safety. In industrial nineteenth-century England, poor children entered labour or institutions early. In caste-based societies, occupation and social position were fixed at birth. In both situations, childhood unfolded within limits already decided by larger systems. Poverty therefore becomes less a temporary crisis and more a repeated social position.

Social exclusion deepens this reality. Poverty is not only about lacking income; it also involves restricted participation. Those placed at the margins may be physically present in society, yet they remain unheard. Their experiences are recorded statistically but rarely acknowledged personally. Over time, repeated exclusion can shape self-perception. When dignity is denied repeatedly, individuals may begin to expect little from society and from themselves.

Institutions often play an ambiguous role in this process. Laws and administrative systems are presented as instruments of order and stability. However, history shows that such systems frequently regulate poverty instead of eliminating it. In Victorian England, the Poor Law sought to manage the poor through discipline. In colonial India, caste rules structured everyday interaction and access to space. In both contexts, social order was preserved, but equality was not achieved.

Contemporary conditions reveal similar patterns. Armed conflict, political instability, and displacement continue to intensify poverty across regions. Migration may provide escape from violence, yet it often leads to new forms of marginalisation. Lack of access to education and healthcare remains a central barrier to mobility. These structural limitations demonstrate that poverty is rarely a simple matter of effort or intention.

For this reason, poverty must be examined not only through economic reports but also through lived experience. Literature provides access to that experience. Through narrative and character, it reveals how inequality feels in daily life. When children stand at the centre of such narratives, the moral tension becomes sharper, because responsibility clearly lies beyond them.

This study is grounded in this structural understanding of poverty. By analysing literary texts from different historical contexts, it seeks to explore how organised systems of hierarchy produce similar patterns of restriction and vulnerability. Although Victorian England and colonial India differ in structure and history, both illustrate how inequality becomes embedded in social life. Literature makes visible the human cost of that embedding.

1.3 Introduction to the Novels

In *Oliver Twist*, poverty in nineteenth-century England is portrayed through the fragile life of an orphan who grows up within institutions designed to regulate the poor. The novel is set during the period of the Poor Laws and the workhouse system, when poverty was treated less as a human tragedy and more as a social issue requiring discipline and control. From his first moments in life, Oliver is absorbed into a system where obedience matters more than wellbeing. Food is rationed, affection is absent, and survival depends on submission. Through scenes of hunger, punishment, and emotional neglect, Dickens exposes a society that views poor children not as individuals but as administrative burdens. Poverty appears not accidental but organised, managed by authorities concerned with order and economy rather than compassion.

Life inside the workhouse shapes children in ways that extend beyond physical deprivation. These institutions deny warmth, security, and emotional development. Oliver's suffering is never framed as the result of laziness or moral weakness; instead, it reveals a structure that criminalises need itself. By placing an innocent child at the centre of the narrative, Dickens intensifies the moral contradiction of a society that celebrates charity while permitting cruelty. Poverty, therefore, emerges as a socially constructed condition sustained through bureaucratic authority and indifference.

In contrast, *Untouchable*, set in early twentieth-century colonial India, portrays poverty through the rigid framework of caste. The novel follows Bakha, a young sweeper boy whose life is restricted not by formal institutions but by inherited social hierarchy. Every aspect of his day where he walks, whom he addresses, how he drinks water is regulated by customs that appear ordinary to others yet devastating to him. Unlike Oliver's experience within visible systems of governance, Bakha's deprivation is enforced through daily interactions and social attitudes. His exclusion from wells, temples, and public spaces shows that poverty here is inseparable from humiliation and ritual impurity.

By focusing on a single ordinary day in Bakha's life, the novel reveals how deeply caste structures human

existence. Poverty is not simply the absence of money; it is the constant reminder of inferiority. Although Bakha's labour is necessary for society, his presence is treated as contamination. This contradiction lies at the heart of caste-based oppression. The repetition of insult and restriction across generations suggests that such suffering is neither accidental nor temporary, but inherited and normalised.

Despite their different cultural and historical settings, both novels portray poverty as something imposed rather than chosen. In each case, birth determines social value. Childhood becomes the most powerful lens through which injustice is exposed, since both Oliver and Bakha endure deprivation without responsibility for the conditions shaping their lives. Poverty affects not only material survival but also dignity, confidence, and emotional security.

Control operates differently in the two narratives, yet its effects converge. In *Oliver Twist*, authority is visible in the form of regulations, surveillance, and punishment. In *Untouchable*, control operates through fear of pollution and social exclusion. Whether through bureaucracy or custom, both systems silence resistance and demand acceptance of hierarchy. Poverty thus appears organised, maintained through structures that present inequality as natural.

Reading these novels together allows poverty to be examined beyond a single national context. Dickens reflects class inequality within an industrial society, while Anand exposes caste-based exclusion within colonial India. Both writers demonstrate that poverty is sustained by power, reinforced by tradition, and inherited across generations. Their works suggest that literature can reveal how deeply social structures shape human suffering.

The central concerns emerging from these texts: social exclusion, institutional and cultural control, childhood vulnerability, and loss of dignity form the foundation of this study. While this section introduces the broader framework, subsequent chapters will analyse these themes more closely through detailed textual comparison. Together, the novels invite a reconsideration of poverty not as personal failure but as a systemic and human reality.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study takes its importance from the way it connects literary representation with ongoing social inequality. Poverty in *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* is not described merely as economic deprivation. It enters the emotional lives of the characters. Hunger, shame, humiliation, and exclusion gradually shape how Oliver and Bakha see themselves. What begins as material lack becomes something deeper: a threat to dignity. Fiction makes this dimension visible in ways that social statistics often cannot.

Both protagonists encounter inequality early in life. Oliver's hunger in the workhouse and Bakha's public humiliation after being called "polluted" are not exceptional events; they reveal systems already in place

before either child can make choices. Birth determines position. Over time, repeated rejection weakens confidence and restricts imagination. The novels suggest that poverty does not only limit opportunity; it shapes identity.

There is also a wider relevance. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 1 calls for ending poverty "in all its forms everywhere." The wording is significant. Poverty has social and psychological forms as well as economic ones. While policy frameworks address structural reform, literature draws attention to lived experience. Through character and narrative, readers confront inequality not as theory but as human reality.

Reading Dickens and Anand together sharpens this insight. Industrial England and colonial India represent different contexts, yet both contain hierarchies that assign value at birth. Class in one case, caste in the other, distinct systems, similar consequences. Restricted mobility, social exclusion, diminished belonging. The comparison suggests that poverty cannot be dismissed as a local failure; it reflects broader patterns of power. The emphasis on childhood intensifies the argument. Children cannot be blamed for the structures they inherit. When deprivation shapes early life, the ethical stakes become clearer. Oliver and Bakha endure systems they neither designed nor fully understand. Their vulnerability exposes the limits of institutions and traditions that normalise inequality.

For this reason, the study contributes not only to literary scholarship but also to discussions of justice and dignity. It approaches poverty as a lived experience rather than an abstract category. Literature does not solve inequality, but it compels recognition. Through narrative, poverty appears not simply as lack of money but as a condition that shapes self-worth, belonging, and moral responsibility.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review

A literature review is essential in defining the direction and responsibility of any academic project. It allows the researcher to understand how a subject has already been examined, what arguments have shaped discussion, and where limitations remain. Without this step, research risks repeating established interpretations. Engaging with earlier scholarship also places the present study within an ongoing conversation rather than isolating it from critical tradition.

In relation to *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable*, there is already extensive scholarship addressing poverty, injustice, inequality, class hierarchy, and caste discrimination. Both novels are widely recognised as socially engaged works within their historical settings. However, much of this research tends to treat the texts within separate national frameworks. As a result, direct comparative dialogue between the two remains relatively limited.

General Studies on *Oliver Twist*

Studies of *Oliver Twist* often situate the novel within Victorian England, particularly in relation to the Poor Law Amendment Act and the workhouse system. Scholars repeatedly draw attention to Dickens's exposure of institutional harshness and the treatment of poor children under class authority. The workhouse is frequently described as a controlled environment in which discipline replaces care and regulation overshadows compassion.

Researchers generally agree that class hierarchy determines social value from birth in the novel. Oliver's suffering is rarely interpreted as personal failure. Instead, critics understand his condition as the outcome of systemic neglect. Poverty appears organised and managed rather than accidental. In this way, the novel is seen as a critique of structures that control the poor while preserving privilege.

Critical Studies on *Oliver Twist*

John Bowen reads *Oliver Twist* as a direct confrontation with institutional cruelty. He suggests that Dickens represents the workhouse as a space where authority displaces moral responsibility. In Bowen's view, the poor are "administered rather than understood," which reveals how bureaucratic systems convert human need into administrative concern.

Philip Collins also challenges the Victorian assumption that poverty results from vice. He argues that Dickens portrays children as "products of circumstance rather than agents of vice," thereby shifting attention from moral blame to structural condition. According to Collins, criminal behaviour in the novel grows out of deprivation and neglect rather than inherent corruption.

Together, these interpretations strengthen the understanding of *Oliver Twist* as a structural critique of class-based inequality.

General Studies on *Untouchable*

Scholarship on *Untouchable* consistently addresses caste as a system that fixes social position at birth. Critics emphasise how hierarchy governs movement, access to resources, and even physical proximity between individuals. Poverty in the novel is therefore intertwined with ritual impurity and inherited status.

Studies frequently highlight Anand's decision to narrate a single ordinary day. This narrative strategy underscores repetition. Oppression does not appear extraordinary or dramatic; it unfolds through routine encounters. Scholars also observe that exclusion in the novel extends beyond economics. Denial of water, restricted access to public space, and constant verbal humiliation reveal how caste shapes both material and psychological experience.

Critical Studies on *Untouchable*

M. K. Naik identifies *Untouchable* as a central work of social realism in Indian English literature. He argues that Anand exposes caste oppression without symbolic concealment, showing how society “reduces human beings to social functions instead of recognising them as individuals.” For Naik, Bakha’s suffering emerges from inherited hierarchy rather than personal inadequacy.

Meenakshi Mukherjee similarly emphasises the ethical seriousness of Anand’s realism. She notes that caste humiliation is presented through “ordinary human situations rather than dramatic excess.” This technique makes discrimination appear habitual and socially accepted. Mukherjee particularly stresses the psychological dimension of repeated exclusion and its effect on dignity and self-perception.

These critical perspectives consistently interpret the novel as presenting poverty as socially produced and sustained.

Comparative Studies

Comparative literary approaches allow patterns to emerge that may remain unnoticed within national boundaries. When texts from different contexts are placed alongside one another, shared structures of inequality become clearer.

Although class and caste differ historically, both generate inherited disadvantages. Children such as Oliver and Bakha experience consequences shaped long before personal agency develops. Comparative reading therefore shifts attention toward structural similarity rather than cultural difference.

Despite this potential, relatively few studies engage *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* in sustained dialogue. Class and caste are typically examined within separate traditions. This gap creates space for research that foregrounds cross-cultural comparison and emotional impact.

Beyond the absence of sustained comparison, another limitation becomes visible: much of the scholarship prioritises social systems at a theoretical level but does not always dwell on how those systems feel from within. Structural analysis is essential, yet the emotional and psychological consequences of inherited inequality often remain secondary. Fear, silence, internalised shame, and loss of self-worth are acknowledged but not consistently examined across contexts. By placing Oliver and Bakha in dialogue, this study attempts to move beyond structural description toward a more human-centred understanding of how systems shape identity from childhood. In doing so, it treats poverty not only as social organisation but as lived and remembered experience.

Review of Related Research Studies

Several academic projects have explored poverty in Dickens’s fiction. The doctoral thesis *Poverty and Institutional Control in Dickens’s Fiction* (2016) examines workhouses and the Poor Laws as

disciplinary mechanisms, though its analysis remains confined to the English setting. Similarly, *Childhood Suffering and Social Inequality in Victorian Novels* (2018) addresses child vulnerability but does not extend beyond British society.

In the Indian context, *Caste, Identity, and Marginalisation in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand* (2017) provides detailed discussion of inherited discrimination, yet it does not situate caste within broader global systems. *Social Realism and Caste Oppression in Indian English Fiction* (2019) focuses on narrative realism while treating caste largely as a local phenomenon.

A small number of comparative works, including *Class and Caste in Select British and Indian Novels* (2020), briefly mention Dickens and Anand together. However, these studies do not foreground childhood experience or the psychological consequences of poverty.

Taken together, existing scholarship demonstrates sustained interest in poverty, class, and caste. At the same time, cross-cultural and child-centred comparisons remain relatively underdeveloped. This gap provides the foundation for the present study.

2.2 Problem Statement

Oliver Twist and *Untouchable* have each generated substantial scholarship, yet they are usually discussed within separate literary traditions. Research on Dickens tends to remain within the framework of Victorian England, concentrating on the Poor Laws, institutional discipline, and class hierarchy. In contrast, studies of Anand focus on caste, colonial society, and social exclusion in early twentieth-century India. These approaches have produced valuable insights, but they rarely move beyond their respective cultural contexts.

When the novels are treated in isolation, important parallels remain obscured. Class and caste function differently, yet both determine social position at birth and restrict mobility long before individual agency can develop. Although critics frequently analyse poverty as a structural condition, less attention is given to its emotional dimension across cultures. Fear, shame, silence, and internalised inferiority shape both Oliver's and Bakha's lives, yet this psychological impact is seldom examined comparatively.

Another gap becomes visible when attention shifts to childhood. Oliver and Bakha are often discussed as figures of injustice, but fewer studies explore childhood itself as the most exposed point of systemic inequality. Children do not create the hierarchies that confine them. Nevertheless, they endure their effects at a formative stage. The ethical implications of this vulnerability deserve closer comparative analysis than they have typically received.

Theoretical approaches also tend to remain divided. Victorian class inequality is frequently interpreted

through Marxist criticism, while caste oppression is more commonly examined through postcolonial frameworks. Each perspective is productive within its own context, yet they are seldom placed in dialogue. Bringing these frameworks into conversation may reveal shared structural patterns that transcend national boundaries.

For this reason, the present study addresses a specific absence in existing scholarship: a sustained comparative analysis of *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* that foregrounds childhood and examines poverty as a systemic condition. Reading the novels together allows poverty to be understood not simply as a historical or local issue, but as a recurring human experience shaped by unequal social structures.

2.3 Research Objectives

- To analyse how poverty in *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* is portrayed as a socially organised and structurally produced condition rather than an individual failing.
- To compare Victorian class hierarchy with the colonial caste system in order to understand how inherited social structures determine human worth from birth.
- To examine Oliver's workhouse upbringing and Bakha's everyday experiences as outcomes of institutional control, social customs, and inherited hierarchy.
- To explore the emotional and psychological consequences of poverty—fear, humiliation, silence, and damaged self-confidence—experienced by marginalized children.

2.4 Research Methodology

This study approaches *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* through careful interpretation rather than numerical data or field investigation. The focus remains on the narratives themselves, how poverty appears in language, character, and setting, and how unequal social systems shape the lives of those within the story. Because the project is literary in nature, meaning is drawn from close engagement with the texts.

Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* form the core of the discussion. Each novel centres on a child living under a rigid social hierarchy. Although the historical settings differ, both narratives reveal how inequality is organised and sustained. Reading them alongside one another allows patterns of deprivation to become more visible.

Attention moves between Oliver, Bakha, Nancy, and Sohini. Oliver's childhood unfolds under institutional supervision shaped by class hierarchy. Bakha's daily experiences reflect inherited caste boundaries. Nancy's position illustrates survival within urban poverty, while Sohini's vulnerability demonstrates how caste and gender combine to intensify exclusion. Through these figures, the study traces both shared and contrasting dimensions of inequality.

Comparison is central to the discussion. Rather than treating class and caste separately, the analysis places them in conversation. Differences remain important, yet the emotional consequences: fear, humiliation, restricted opportunity, and damaged dignity often echo across contexts.

Close reading guides interpretation. Narrative detail, descriptive imagery, dialogue, and recurring motifs such as hunger, insult, and silence are examined to understand how social realities are shaped through storytelling. The emphasis remains on how literature renders structural inequality visible in human terms.

Critical works and historical scholarship provide background on Victorian social policy, colonial society, caste hierarchy, and class relations. These perspectives support the discussion while leaving space for independent interpretation.

The study also reflects briefly on Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty), not as policy advocacy but as an ethical frame. The concern here is awareness how fiction invites readers to recognise poverty as structured injustice rather than personal weakness.

Throughout, arguments remain grounded in textual evidence. Sources are acknowledged, interpretations are developed in original language, and analysis avoids unsupported generalisation.

2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1.1 Marxist Literary Theory

Marxist literary thinking draws attention to power, labour, and inequality within social systems. Instead of viewing poverty as accidental or personal, it asks who benefits from existing arrangements and who remains confined by them. In this view, inequality does not emerge randomly. It is sustained through economic and institutional structures that shape access to dignity, mobility, and opportunity. Poverty is therefore not a moral weakness but a position created within organised relations of power.

One of the central concerns of Marxist theory is the relationship between labour and value. In many societies, those who produce essential work are not those who receive recognition or protection. Economic systems often separate labour from dignity. The worker becomes necessary but remains marginal. This separation creates a hierarchy in which power accumulates upward while vulnerability concentrates downward. Literature, from a Marxist perspective, exposes how such hierarchies are normalised.

Institutions frequently appear neutral or protective. Laws, welfare systems, courts, and administrative bodies claim to maintain order. Yet Marxist criticism questions whether these institutions serve everyone equally. Often, they regulate poverty rather than eliminate it. They control visibility, manage behaviour, and define who is “deserving.” Responsibility for suffering is quietly shifted away from systems and placed onto individuals. In this way, regulation replaces justice.

This perspective becomes especially useful in reading *Oliver Twist*. Oliver's life begins inside the workhouse, a space designed not to nurture but to discipline. Food is calculated and emotion is disregarded. When Oliver asks, "Please, sir, I want some more," the request is treated as defiance rather than hunger. The response reveals that authority protects order before humanity. Mr. Bumble repeatedly invokes "the law" to justify cruelty, demonstrating how institutional power hides behind rules to avoid moral accountability. Through such moments, Dickens suggests that poverty is preserved through management rather than compassion.

Economic limitation in the novel also restricts movement and choice. Oliver does not shape his circumstances; they are imposed upon him from birth. Fear and humiliation operate as tools of control. Children learn silence because speech invites punishment. From a Marxist lens, this reflects how class hierarchy maintains itself by limiting mobility and discouraging resistance.

Although *Untouchable* centres on caste, similar dynamics appear. Bakha performs sanitation labour essential to the town's functioning, yet he receives neither respect nor equality. His work sustains society, but society denies his presence. This division between labour and dignity reflects a broader material imbalance. Bakha's exclusion is not based on effort or ability but on inherited position. His value is determined before his actions.

When read together, the novels illustrate how systems maintain inequality by making it appear natural. Class and caste differ in structure, yet both organise poverty through inherited limitation. Children become the clearest victims because they lack authority to question what confines them. Using Marxist theory as a guiding framework allows this study to examine how power operates quietly through institutions and social expectations, and how literature makes visible the human consequences of organised inequality.

2.4.1.2 Postcolonial Theory

Colonial rule did more than establish political authority; it reshaped how societies understood difference, hierarchy, and belonging. Power operated not only through administration but through ideas about superiority and inferiority. In many colonised contexts, these external hierarchies interacted with pre-existing divisions such as caste, strengthening systems that already limited mobility and dignity. Social inequality therefore became embedded in daily life rather than confined to official institutions.

Postcolonial theory draws attention to how domination continues even when it is not openly violent. It asks how identities are shaped by systems that repeatedly define certain groups as lesser, impure, or backward. When such labels are repeated across generations, they begin to appear natural. People are not simply excluded; they are taught to see themselves through the categories imposed upon them. Poverty in this sense is inseparable from identity. It is not only about material lack, but about restricted recognition and denied

humanity. Under such conditions, exclusion is not always dramatic. It often appears routine. When certain groups are repeatedly treated as impure or lesser, those labels gradually influence identity itself. Rejection becomes habitual. Over time, confidence weakens and silence replaces resistance. Poverty extends beyond lack of income; it involves restricted access to space, recognition, and self-worth. The emotional consequences: shame, fear, and hesitation become part of lived experience.

These ideas illuminate the world of *Untouchable*. Although the novel is set during British rule, the most immediate force shaping Bakha's life is caste hierarchy. His position is defined before he speaks or acts. He must announce his approach in public spaces, avoid physical contact, and depend on others even for water. These practices are not enforced through constant formal punishment; they are sustained through custom and repetition. Because they are normalised, they appear ordinary rather than oppressive.

Bakha's labour is essential to the functioning of the town. Without his work, daily life would collapse. Yet that labour brings no dignity. The separation between usefulness and respect becomes central to his experience. He cleans what others refuse to touch, yet he himself is treated as pollution. This contradiction exposes how caste constructs value selectively accepting labour while rejecting the labourer. His exclusion is not the result of wrongdoing but of inherited status. The novel shows how identity is imposed long before agency develops. Physical hunger wounds the body, but social humiliation erodes dignity more quietly and persistently.

The presence of colonial authority in the background complicates this picture. Rather than dismantling caste divisions, colonial rule coexists with them. Social fragmentation makes collective resistance more difficult. Imperial power benefits from internal divisions that prevent unity among the oppressed. Anand does not present this interaction through overt political argument; instead, it emerges through daily encounters and subtle detail. Power operates simultaneously at multiple levels imperial and local; reinforcing inequality through layered systems.

Through this lens, poverty in *Untouchable* appears as a condition produced by intersecting structures of domination. It is not only economic hardship but also organised exclusion and identity denial. Bakha's experience reveals how deeply hierarchy can shape both outer circumstance and inner consciousness. Literature, in turn, becomes a space where these invisible forms of control are made visible, allowing readers to recognise that inherited inequality is sustained not by fate, but by human systems that can, and must, be questioned.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Data Collection and Analytical Approach

The discussion now turns directly to *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable*. Poverty appears here as lived experience rather than theory. Scenes of hunger, humiliation, and quiet restriction carry more weight than abstract definition. Close reading draws attention to small details how food is rationed, how space is controlled, how shame lingers long after a public insult. These details may seem minor, yet they reveal how inequality becomes ordinary and repeated until it feels natural.

Oliver, Bakha, Nancy, and Sohini anchor the analysis. Their circumstances differ. Still, each life makes inequality visible in concrete form. Oliver grows up inside institutional supervision where obedience is valued more than comfort. Even a simple request for food becomes an act of rebellion. Bakha moves cautiously through public space, aware that even accidental contact may invite insult or violence. Nancy survives within networks that exploit vulnerability and offer no real escape. Sohini's experience reveals how caste and gender combine to intensify exclusion, exposing how silence can become a form of forced protection.

The method of analysis relies on close textual reading rather than external measurement. Attention is given to repeated actions, patterns of speech, and descriptions of setting. Hunger in the workhouse is not only about food; it signals discipline and control. Bakha's need to announce his presence is not only about sound; it signals inherited hierarchy. The repetition of such moments shows how poverty is sustained not by dramatic events alone but by everyday practice.

Historical context informs the reading but does not dominate it. Dickens portrays class discipline and bureaucratic order in nineteenth-century England. Anand presents caste as an inherited boundary in colonial India. The systems are not identical. Yet similar emotional patterns emerge: fear, hesitation, internalised silence, and the shrinking of self-worth.

Comparison develops gradually. Institutional control in one text and caste hierarchy in the other operate through different mechanisms, but both shape childhood before choice is possible. Neither Oliver nor Bakha determines his starting point. That absence of agency matters. It reveals how inequality begins long before resistance can form.

Marxist and postcolonial perspectives remain present as interpretive guides. They help clarify how power operates and how hierarchy is maintained. The argument, however, grows primarily from the novels themselves, allowing narrative experience to lead interpretation rather than forcing theory onto the text.

Across both works, poverty appears sustained through repetition. Small acts accumulate denial, restriction, insult, and silence. Over time, dignity narrows and possibility shrinks. The chapter therefore strengthens the

study's central claim: inequality is organised, sustained through systems, and literature makes its human cost impossible to ignore.

3.2 Oliver Twist: Poverty, Institutions, and Class Oppression

Victorian England combined rapid industrial expansion with deep social division. National wealth increased, yet it did not reach everyone. In crowded cities, many families survived in conditions marked by hunger, disease, and instability. For the poor, hardship was rarely temporary. It passed from one generation to the next. Children bore the consequences most sharply. Survival often replaced education, care, and security.

In *Oliver Twist*, poverty does not appear as personal failure but it is organised. From infancy, Oliver enters the workhouse system created under the Poor Law. Its purpose is management, not transformation. Discipline structures daily life and surveillance is constant. Meals are calculated with precision. Dickens notes that the boys received “three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week.” The detail is small, but its meaning is not. Insufficiency is deliberate.

Inside the workhouse, children become numbers rather than individuals. Bodies are counted. Movements are supervised. When Oliver asks, “Please, sir, I want some more,” the words are simple. The response is not. Hunger is treated as defiance. Authority interprets need as threat. The innocence of the request sharpens the cruelty of the reaction. At this moment, vulnerability itself is criminalised. The board members are described as “very sage, deep, philosophical men,” yet their wisdom produces starvation. Irony exposes hypocrisy.

Hunger functions as regulation. It weakens resistance. It produces fear. Dickens describes how the boys “suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months,” emphasising duration rather than accident. Deprivation is organised over time. By controlling nourishment, the institution controls behaviour. Physical weakness becomes social obedience.

Punishment extends this logic. Oliver is isolated and displayed as warning. Silence becomes protection. Questioning becomes dangerous. Emotional harm follows physical restriction. Confidence shrinks. Obedience grows. The children learn that survival depends on invisibility.

The officials embody this system. Their language revolves around cost and legality. Mr. Bumble's phrase, “The law supposes that,” reveals how authority hides behind regulation. Law becomes justification. Responsibility disappears. Compassion is dismissed as impractical. Even Mrs. Mann, entrusted with care, is described as a woman who “appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use,” suggesting that corruption grows easily where the powerless cannot protest.

Beyond the workhouse walls, similar suspicion persists. Oliver's poverty marks him. Fear is interpreted as guilt. Vulnerability becomes evidence. When he is wrongly accused of theft, the assumption of criminality precedes proof. Instead of examining the causes of inequality, society disciplines its victims.

When Oliver leaves the institution, protection does not suddenly appear. Exposure replaces confinement. His encounter with criminal networks grows from neglect, not inclination. Dickens writes that Oliver "was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation." Loneliness becomes another instrument of vulnerability. Poverty creates openings that others use.

Viewed through a Marxist lens, these patterns reveal class power operating through institutions. Wealth and authority remain concentrated, while the poor live under rules they did not create. Relief is promised, but hierarchy is preserved. The system stabilises inequality rather than resolving it. Innocence offers no shield when class determines value.

Dickens reinforces this critique through detail; cold rooms, exhaustion, illness, and persistent anxiety. Poverty wounds the body, yet it also reshapes identity. Children internalise the belief that they are burdens. Emotional security erodes quietly.

Ultimately, *Oliver Twist* presents poverty as structured and sustained. Victorian institutions protect order while neglecting care. Through Oliver's experience, inequality appears not as destiny but as consequence. Control replaces compassion and dignity becomes conditional.

3.3 Untouchable: Caste, Social Exclusion, and Inherited Poverty

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* presents poverty as something organised and sustained by caste hierarchy rather than personal failure. Set in early twentieth-century colonial India, the novel makes clear that deprivation extends beyond lack of money. It involves rejection, ritual humiliation, and the steady denial of dignity. Inequality becomes most destructive when it feels ordinary, when it is repeated so often that it appears natural.

Caste functions as a fixed structure that assigns value at birth. Those at the lowest level perform sanitation labour essential to the town's survival, yet they are labelled impure. Their work sustains society but their presence is rejected. This contradiction lies at the centre of the novel's critique. Poverty is enforced not only through limited resources but through deliberate social distance and ritual insult.

Discrimination unfolds in everyday spaces: streets, wells, temples, and neighbourhood paths. None of these spaces are neutral. Bakha must cry out to announce his approach, warning others of his presence. His body is treated as contaminated, movement is regulated, and touch is forbidden. Even access to water depends on

the permission of higher castes. These practices may appear routine, but they operate as daily discipline.

The decision to focus on a single day intensifies this effect. Bakha's suffering does not arise from one dramatic crisis but through accumulation such as he is pushed aside, insulted, and struck for accidental contact. When a man shouts, "You have polluted me!" The accusation reflects belief, not action. Birth becomes evidence.

Over time, such moments teach Bakha that his existence itself is treated as an offence. Poverty enters the mind as well as the body.

Humiliation does not remain external, it settles inward, fear replaces ease, and silence becomes strategy. Bakha restrains his anger because resistance carries danger. Anand shows that poverty regulates behaviour and identity at the same time. While hunger weakens the body, rejection weakens confidence.

Caste-based poverty is further intensified by gender. Through Sohini, the novel reveals another layer of vulnerability. While Bakha faces public insult, Sohini confronts a quieter but more threatening form of marginalisation. Her position is shaped not only by caste but also by patriarchy.

The temple episode makes this visible. When the priest attempts to exploit Sohini and then accuses her of pollution, blame is redirected downward. The cry of defilement protects male authority. Sohini remains silent because the hierarchy leaves no space for protest. Anand describes her as "standing helpless, not knowing what to say or where to go." The scene exposes how caste and gender converge to deny both justice and voice.

Through Sohini's experience, poverty appears as exposure as much as deprivation. Untouchable women endure social rejection and physical vulnerability simultaneously. Bakha internalises humiliation through insult; Sohini through fear and enforced silence. Together, they reveal inequality as layered rather than singular.

Seen through a postcolonial lens, the novel presents caste as a deeply embedded system governing labour, movement, and belonging. Value is fixed at birth and mobility narrows. Colonial authority remains distant and ineffective in challenging traditional hierarchy. Social order persists through habit more than overt violence while exclusion becomes ordinary.

Anand does not offer a simple resolution. The novel closes instead with reflection and the possibility of change through awareness. Suffering is shown without exaggeration. Humiliation appears without melodrama. In doing so, *Untouchable* frames poverty not as destiny but as a failure sustained by silence and protected by tradition. Dignity, the narrative suggests, should never depend on birth.

What makes Anand's portrayal especially powerful is the way he connects humiliation to consciousness.

Bakha does not simply suffer externally; he thinks, compares, and desires. He admires the British soldiers' uniforms and manners, imagining a different form of dignity attached to appearance and discipline. Yet even this admiration reflects displacement. He seeks value in imitation because his own society has denied it to him. When he reflects that he is "a sweeper, a sweeper," the repetition carries weight. It is not just a description of occupation. It is the echo of imposed identity. So, caste becomes an internal voice.

Anand also shows how poverty narrows imagination. Bakha's dreams are fragile. He hopes for small changes, clean clothes, respectful address, and a moment without insult. These are not grand ambitions. They are modest desires shaped by restriction. When expectation itself becomes small, inequality has already entered deeply into the psyche. Poverty here is not only material limitation but the slow reduction of possibility.

The novel repeatedly returns to the idea of pollution. The word functions as a social weapon. When someone cries, "Keep to the side of the road, you low-caste vermin!" Language reinforces hierarchy as much as custom. Words wound. Repetition normalises insults. Over time, degradation becomes the environment. Bakha learns to anticipate rejection before it occurs. This anticipation is another form of control.

At the same time, Anand's realism resists exaggeration. The narrative voice remains restrained. Events unfold with quiet clarity rather than dramatic intensity. This restraint makes the injustice sharper. Nothing appears sensational, yet everything feels systematic. Caste operates not through chaos but through order, through fixed expectations and unquestioned repetition.

Even the brief speeches about reform near the end of the novel do not erase the weight of the day. Instead, they expose uncertainty. Change is imagined, but not guaranteed. Anand leaves readers unsettled. The system remains larger than the individual. What endures most strongly is the image of a young man who desires respect but is taught that his touch pollutes.

Through Bakha and Sohini, *Untouchable* reveals poverty as an inherited boundary, enforced through routine, language, and silence. It insists that deprivation is not accidental but organised. And as long as it is accepted as ordinary, it continues.

3.4 Results and Discussion

The comparative reading of *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* makes one pattern clear: poverty in both novels is structured, not accidental. Although the texts belong to different cultural and historical settings, class oppression in nineteenth-century England and caste hierarchy in colonial India operate through similar processes. Regulation, exclusion, repetition. Authority is protected; vulnerability is contained. Poverty

becomes organised and, over time, normalised. What appears at first as individual suffering slowly reveals itself as social design.

In *Oliver Twist*, deprivation is managed through institutions, workhouses, courts, and administrative offices. These spaces promise order but deliver discipline. Hunger is treated as misconduct. Vulnerability appears as disruption. When Oliver asks, “Please, sir, I want some more,” the request is simple but the reaction is not. Need becomes rebellion. The institutional response reveals a system concerned with control rather than relief. Class hierarchy maintains itself through fear and correction, even charity is conditional, and assistance exists, but dignity does not.

Dickens shows that the system does not collapse because it is cruel; it survives because it is accepted. Officials believe they are doing their duty, regulations are followed, and procedures are respected. In this way, injustice hides behind routine while poverty becomes paperwork where children become cases and responsibility dissolves into structure.

In *Untouchable*, regulation takes a different form. Caste is not enforced primarily through written law but through belief and habit. Bakha’s position is determined at birth and reinforced through daily routines: touch forbidden, movement restricted, and speech monitored. Accusations of pollution convert ordinary presence into offence. Unlike Oliver’s confrontation with visible institutions, Bakha encounters discipline through repeated social gestures. Caste functions as a continuous structure of inherited inequality. It does not require walls; it exists in the minds of people.

Anand makes clear that the violence of caste lies in its repetition. No single insult defines Bakha’s suffering. It is the accumulation of wounds. Each reminder narrows his sense of self and each restriction teaches caution. Over time, inequality becomes internalised.

The emotional consequences in both narratives are strikingly similar. Hunger, humiliation, fear, and isolation shape the inner lives of Oliver and Bakha. Each learns early that vulnerability carries risk. Oliver is punished for expressing need. Bakha is condemned for existing within a category defined as impure. Different systems and comparable psychological damage. Both children begin to measure themselves according to how others see them.

Gender complicates this pattern further. Nancy and Sohini reveal how inequality deepens for women within already unequal structures. Nancy describes herself as “the victim of circumstances,” acknowledging entrapment within class and criminal networks that deny protection. Her moral awareness does not save her. Sohini’s silence after the priest’s false accusation reflects a different but equally powerful confinement. Caste and patriarchy overlap. The voice disappears in both novels, women carry vulnerability in ways that are less visible but equally destructive.

Another pattern emerges through repetition. In both novels, oppression persists less through dramatic violence than through routine. Workhouse schedules and ritualised caste practices transform injustice into daily habit. Over time, what is repeated becomes familiar. What is familiar becomes less questioned. When cruelty becomes ordinary, resistance weakens. Space also operates as control. Oliver's confinement within institutional walls parallels Bakha's restricted movement through marked streets, wells, and temples. Physical environments define belonging, boundaries become visible and invisible at once. Also Mobility narrows and Freedom is conditional.

Silence follows; Oliver learns that speech invites punishment while Bakha learns that protest invites danger. Their quietness is not weakness but adaptation. Literature, however, interrupts that silence by making their experience visible. Through narrative, what society suppresses is spoken.

Taken together, the comparison reinforces a central insight: poverty in both novels is sustained through organised systems whether institutional or traditional. Class and caste differ in origin, yet they produce related patterns of exclusion and emotional harm. Poverty is shown not as a moral defect but as systemic injustice.

These findings resonate with the ethical emphasis of Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty), which recognises deprivation as multidimensional. Economic lack is only one dimension. Denial of dignity and restricted access matter equally. Through narrative, both novels render this reality human and immediate.

Ultimately, *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* stand as parallel critiques of unequal social structures. Through child-centred realism, they reveal how injustice persists when hierarchy goes unquestioned. Literature does not merely describe poverty; it exposes its human cost and invites reflection on responsibility and justice.

IV. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

4.1 Conclusion

Poverty in these novels cannot be confined to income or material shortage. It shapes daily movement, speech, hesitation, and self-perception. Deprivation alters how individuals are seen and how they see themselves. The study has traced how inequality reaches beyond physical hardship into confidence, dignity, and belonging. When social hierarchies reinforce these limits, poverty becomes persistent. For children, those limits appear early and feel inescapable.

Reading *Oliver Twist* beside *Untouchable* reveals how different systems can produce comparable effects. The settings are not the same, yet the pattern is recognisable. Oliver grows within institutions that monitor hunger and discipline vulnerability. Bakha moves within caste boundaries that assign worth at birth. In each case, childhood unfolds under rules already established where choice comes later, if at all.

In Dickens's Victorian world, regulation replaces care. Workhouses and courts respond to need with suspicion where hunger becomes misconduct and fear becomes guilt. Institutions appear orderly, yet that order stabilises hierarchy. In Anand's narrative, caste performs a parallel function through routine practice. Exclusion operates through repetition rather than dramatic force. Poverty, therefore, includes social distance and internalised silence as much as material scarcity.

Gender intensifies these conditions where Nancy and Sohini do not experience inequality in identical ways, yet both occupy vulnerable positions shaped by layered pressures. Thus, survival often demands silence and exposure carries risk. Their presence complicates any single explanation of deprivation.

Marxist and postcolonial perspectives guided the interpretation without replacing textual detail. One clarifies how class power sustains institutional authority; the other illuminates inherited hierarchy and identity formation. Together they reinforce a shared conclusion: poverty emerges from organised arrangements, not personal inadequacy.

The discussion also connects with SDG-1, which recognises poverty as multidimensional. The novels show what that multidimensionality looks like in lived terms, restricted opportunity, fragile security, and denied recognition. So, narrative gives these conditions texture.

Contemporary realities echo these themes where war, displacement, and systemic instability continue to limit people's access to education, healthcare, and protection. The experiences of Oliver and Bakha resonate because similar structures persist. Inequality has not vanished; it has shifted form.

Neither novel resolves its tensions completely as awareness remains open-ended, reform appears unfinished, and social structures endure unless questioned. Through sustained attention to child-centred experience, both works invite that questioning.

Literature preserves what public systems often neglect. Through Oliver, Bakha, Nancy, and Sohini, inequality is recorded not as isolated tragedy but as patterned condition. The study therefore concludes that literary representation remains vital: it makes visible the human consequences of organised inequality and reminds readers that structural injustice demands recognition before it can be addressed.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

This research defines its boundaries clearly as a literary study. Its scope remains confined to two primary texts, *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable*. These novels were selected because they provide focused portrayals of poverty and exclusion through child-centred experience. Yet many other literary works across regions, periods, and genres also address marginalisation. By concentrating on these two texts, the study limits comparison to particular socio-historical contexts rather than engaging a broader literary range.

Attention is directed primarily toward Oliver, Bakha, Nancy, and Sohini. Through these figures, class, caste, and gender intersect visibly. However, no four characters can encompass the full spectrum of poverty's manifestations. Rural hardship, migration, disability, racial marginalisation, and other forms of structural vulnerability remain outside the present analysis. Their absence reflects necessary focus rather than dismissal.

The interpretive framework further shapes the study's boundaries. Marxist and postcolonial perspectives guide the reading of class-based and caste-based inequality. These approaches illuminate structural power effectively in the selected novels. At the same time, other critical lenses as feminist theory, subaltern studies, cultural materialism, and psychological criticism are not applied in depth. Different emphases might have generated alternative insights into resistance, voice, identity, or gendered experience.

The thematic direction of the research also narrows its range. Hunger, exclusion, shame, dignity, institutional control, and inherited hierarchy form the core concerns. Literary technique: imagery, symbolism, narrative structure, and stylistic patterning receives less sustained attention. This prioritisation supports clarity of argument, yet it limits extended formal analysis.

The connection to SDG-1 (No Poverty) remains interpretive rather than empirical. The study does not engage economic modelling, statistical data, policy frameworks, or field research. Its engagement with the global goal operates at the level of ethical reflection and literary representation rather than measurable development strategy. These boundaries do not undermine the central argument. Instead, they clarify the academic focus of the project. By defining its limits, the study creates space for further research across additional texts, theoretical approaches, interdisciplinary methods, and comparative contexts. The present work remains concentrated on examining poverty as system-produced condition within specific literary frameworks, leaving broader expansion to future scholarship.

4.3 Future Scope and Recommendations

The discussion of *Oliver Twist* and *Untouchable* does not close the subject of poverty in literature but it only opens it further. The patterns identified in these novels suggest that similar structures of inequality may be found in many other societies and historical moments. Poverty in these texts is not isolated or accidental; it grows from systems that organise hierarchy and protect power. Extending this comparative approach to African, Latin American, Middle Eastern, or contemporary refugees, literature could widen the perspective. Such expansion would help show how exclusion reappears in different cultural forms, yet continues to produce familiar emotional and social consequences. Poverty, when viewed across texts and regions, appears less as a local problem and more as a repeated human condition shaped by structured inequality.

The child-centred focus of the present study also marks a natural boundary. While childhood exposes

vulnerability clearly, poverty affects people differently at various stages of life. Adults facing unemployment, elderly individuals living without support, migrant labourers negotiating unstable environments, and displaced communities trying to rebuild identity may reveal other dimensions of deprivation and resilience. Exploring these perspectives would deepen understanding of how poverty reshapes identity, dignity, and belonging beyond childhood. Such studies could also show how people adapt, resist, or endure under different forms of structural pressure.

There is further room for theoretical expansion. Marxist and postcolonial frameworks clarified class and caste structures in this study, yet other approaches may offer additional insight. Feminist criticism could examine gendered vulnerability more closely, particularly through characters such as Nancy and Sohini. Subaltern studies might deepen discussion of voice, silence, and representation. Cultural materialism could illuminate how ideology works quietly within daily habits and accepted traditions. Bringing multiple frameworks into dialogue may allow future research to present more layered and complex interpretations of inequality.

Another important direction concerns the relationship between literature and global development discourse. Frameworks such as SDG-1 address poverty through policy and measurable targets, while literature reveals its lived and emotional dimensions. Fiction complicates simplified categories and restores individuality to those reduced to numbers. Future research could examine more closely how narrative representation influences ethical awareness and public understanding. Literature does not replace policy, but it shapes perception and responsibility.

Contemporary writing shaped by war, forced migration, climate crisis, and economic instability shows that poverty continues to change form while remaining structurally rooted. Placing nineteenth and early twentieth-century novels beside modern narratives would highlight both continuity and transformation. Literature functions not only as a record of past injustice but also as an ongoing witness to present realities.

The inquiry, therefore, remains open rather than complete. Expanding textual range, theoretical dialogue, and interdisciplinary engagement would continue to illuminate how inequality is structured and how it is narrated. Literary study returns repeatedly to lived experience, reminding readers that behind every system stand human lives. In this sense, literature remains more than aesthetic expression. It endures as a space where injustice is remembered, questioned, and ethically confronted.

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