



## Social Exclusion and Marginalised Voices: A Study of Caste and Class in Mansfield's *"The Doll's House"* and Lahiri's *"A Real Durwan"*

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### Abstract

This paper examines how caste and class-based exclusion are shown in Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *A Real Durwan*. Both stories show how social systems create unfair treatment of people because of their caste or class. In *The Doll's House*, the Kelveys, who are poor and from a lower social class, are poorly treated by other children just because of their status. Similarly, in *A Real Durwan*, Boori Ma, a poor woman from a lower caste, is mistreated and seen as inferior by others in her community, even though she once worked as a Durwan (gatekeeper) for a building.

The paper examines how these characters, the Kelveys and Boori Ma, are affected by the social barriers that divide people into different classes. It also examines how these barriers are not just personal but part of bigger social and cultural systems that keep certain groups on the edges of society. By focusing on these two stories, the article shows how caste and class ideas are not only part of the characters' lives but are also linked to bigger societal problems.

Through this study, the article wants to show how literature can help us understand the real-life effects of caste and class-based exclusion. The research connects these themes to larger discussions about social inequalities, helping us see how literature reflects and criticises how society treats people based on their social position.

### Keywords

Social exclusion, caste system, class divide, marginalisation, inequality, social hierarchies, poverty, displacement, ostracisation, vulnerability

### Introduction

**Social exclusion** is when some people or groups are left out or pushed away from the rest of society due to deep-rooted **social hierarchies** and unequal access to power. This often happens because of their race, gender, caste, class, religion, or other differences. People who are socially excluded do not get the same rights, chances, or respect as others. They may be kept away from good schools, jobs, houses, or friendships. This makes a cycle where the excluded people stay poor or are treated unfairly, and no one listens to them.

Social exclusion is a strong idea in books and stories. Writers use stories to show how unfair systems work in the real world. They use characters, places, and problems to show how some people are ignored. Stories help readers feel what it is like to be left out. They also show how bad it feels and how it hurts people. Books not only tell stories but can also help change things. They help people see what is wrong in society and make them think about fairness and justice.

Many stories from around the world show different types of exclusion, like being left out because of class, caste, gender, or race. Looking at these stories closely, we can see how unfair



systems are made and how they hurt people's lives. This research article examines two stories: *The Doll's House* by Katherine Mansfield and *A Real Durwan* by Jhumpa Lahiri. Both stories discuss exclusion, unfairness, and being pushed aside in different cultures.

Caste and class-based discrimination:

Caste and class discrimination are two big ways people have been divided in society for a long time. The **caste system** is a rigid social order mostly found in South Asia, especially India. In this system, people are born into groups called castes. These groups decide what jobs people can do and whom they can marry. The people at the bottom of the **caste system** are called "untouchables" or Dalits. They often face violence, **poverty**, and are left out of society. Even though caste discrimination is now against the law in many countries, it still happens in both secret and open ways.

Both caste and class discrimination are unfair. They make some people feel less important than others. Literature often discusses these problems by showing characters who are treated badly because of their caste or class. Stories can show how these unfair systems and social hierarchies hurt people in their daily lives and how people get used to this unfair treatment.

*The Doll's House* and *A Real Durwan* are narratives that depict marginalised voices:

Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *A Real Durwan* are short stories about people mistreated because of their social status. Both stories talk about characters who are usually ignored, judged, or left out by other people in society. These stories show that society can be unkind to people who do not belong to a certain class or group.

In *The Doll's House*, the story takes place in New Zealand and is about a group of schoolgirls. The rich girls get a pretty doll's house to play with and only invite their rich friends to see it. Two poor girls, the Burnell sisters, are not allowed to see the doll's house because they are poor. Even though the poor girls are kind and well-behaved, they are still left out because they are not rich. This shows how even young children learn to treat others badly based on class.

In *A Real Durwan*, the story occurs in an apartment building in Kolkata, India. Boori Ma is an old woman who works as a gatekeeper, also called a "durwan." She tells stories about her past and says she was rich before. The people who live in the building do not fully believe her, but they still let her stay. But when something bad happens, they blame her and send her away, even though she did nothing wrong. She becomes an easy person to blame because she is poor and has no power. Both stories show how poor or weak people are often blamed, left out, or treated badly for no good reason.

How both stories portray systemic **inequality** through their characters and settings:

Both *The Doll's House* and *A Real Durwan* show how society mistreats people because of their caste, class, or social level. These stories do not show only one or two people being mean; instead, they show how big systems are made to maintain **inequality** and keep some people in power while pushing others down. The characters who suffer in these stories are not just unlucky. They are hurt by a system that thinks they are not important.

In *The Doll's House*, the school and the family show how children learn about class differences at a young age. The rich girls are liked, and their actions are seen as okay, while the poor girls are not treated well, even though they did nothing wrong. How the children act shows what they have learned from grown-ups, that money and status are more important than being kind or fair.



In *A Real Durwan*, the apartment building shows a society that only cares about comfort and how things look. Boori Ma is used and not cared for. When something bad happens, she is blamed and thrown out. The people in the building do not see her as a real person with feelings or a past. They only see her as someone who does not fit in. This shows how class can make people act in cold and unfair ways.

### ***Social Exclusion and Marginalised Voices: A Study of Caste and Class in Mansfield's "The Doll's House" and Lahiri's "A Real Durwan"***

#### **1. The Doll's House – Exclusion and Class Divide**

In Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Doll's House," we see how people are treated differently because of their social class, revealing a strong class divide among the children. The story is about two sisters, Lil and Else Kelvey, who are treated badly because they are poor. Their father is said to be in jail, and their mother washes clothes for work. Because of this, the other children and even the townspeople do not talk to or include them.

One big example is when the wealthy Burnell family gets a beautiful doll's house. All the other children are invited to see it, except for the Kelvey sisters. Even though it is just a toy, it shows who is rich and who is not. Only children from wealthy families are allowed to enjoy it. This shows how even small things can be used to exclude others.

The doll's house in the story is full of meaning. It is big, fancy, and smells like paint. It has tiny furniture and a little lamp that everyone loves. The doll's house shows how rich the Burnells are and the kind of life they live, which is a life that does not include people like the Kelveys. The little lamp is special. Even Else Kelvey notices it and remembers it. This shows that the Kelveys can also see and love beautiful things like rich children.

School also helps teach these unfair ideas about class. The children learn from their parents that some people are better than others. They copy this behaviour at school by ignoring or making fun of the Kelveys. For example, Isabel Burnell is happy to show the doll's house but does not invite the Kelveys. Another girl, Emmie, laughs at them and says mean things. Most kids do this to fit in and not be different.

But one small act stands out. Kezia, the youngest Burnell girl, doesn't understand why the Kelveys are poorly treated. She invites them to see the doll's house. This shows that kids can sometimes see what's unfair better than grown-ups. This moment gives us a little bit of hope. It shows that kindness is possible, even in a world that treats people unfairly.

In the end, Mansfield shows us how class and money can change how people treat each other, especially kids. Through the story of the Kelvey sisters, the doll's house, and the school, we see how people learn to mistreat others because of their social class, which marginalises the economically disadvantaged.

#### **2. A Real Durwan – Caste and Survival Struggles**

Jhumpa Lahiri's short story *A Real Durwan* shows how people treat others badly if they are poor or from a lower social group. The story is about **Boori Ma**, an older woman who works as a durwan (a doorkeeper) in an apartment building in Kolkata. Even though she takes care of the gate and helps with small things, the people do not pay her properly or treat her with respect, showing how **poverty** can strip someone of dignity and status. They do not see her as an important person. She is there, but most people act like she does not matter.



**Boori Ma** often tells stories about her past. She says she once lived in a big house with servants and had many nice things. She became poor after the Partition of India with Pakistan, a time marked by large-scale **displacement** and trauma. She came to live in Kolkata after the partition, which is central Bengal. We do not know if her stories are true, but that is not the main point. The stories help her feel proud and keep her identity. But the people do not believe her. They think she is just a poor older woman who talks too much. Slowly, people stop caring about her. This shows how poor people are often ignored by society.

Her job as a durwan should give her some respect and a role in the building. But one day, a valuable sink is stolen from the building. The people blame Boori Ma, even though they have no proof. They blame her just because she is poor and has no power. No one helps her or listens to her. She loses her job, her place to sleep, and the small amount of respect she has. At the end of the story, she is all alone and even more invisible than before.

Lahiri also uses the **building** as a symbol. The building stands for safety, comfort, and a feeling of belonging. The people inside the building live behind locked doors and feel safe. But Boori Ma, who guards the door, has no home of her own. She sleeps in the hallway on a mat and carries all her things in a bundle. This shows that poor people are often the ones who keep others safe, but they have no safety themselves. Their lives are very hard, and they can lose everything quickly, just like Boori Ma does in the story.

Later, the people in the building decide to get a “real” durwan. This new person looks more official and comes from a better background. This shows that people care more about looks, especially attire and class, than loyalty or kindness. Boori Ma did her job well, but still faces **ostracisation** because she does not look like the kind of person they want.

Ultimately, *A Real Durwan* shows how caste and class can decide who gets to live with dignity. Boori Ma’s story is like many others where poor people are blamed, silenced, and forgotten. Lahiri uses her character to show how unfair and unkind the world can be to those who are poor and powerless.

### 3. Comparative Study of Both Stories

Katherine Mansfield’s *The Doll’s House* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *A Real Durwan* deal with **social exclusion**. But they show this in different places and different ways. *The Doll’s House* happens in New Zealand in the early 1900s. People in the story are judged by how rich they are and what family they come from. The Kelveys are poor. Their mother washes clothes, and people say their father is in jail. Even though they attend the same school as other children, no one treats them as equals. *A Real Durwan* is set in modern-day India. There, too, people are judged by class and caste. Boori Ma is a poor, older woman. She works as a gatekeeper in an apartment building. She is a refugee and has no family to help her. Even though the two stories happen in different places and times, both show how poor people are mistreated because of their origins.

Both writers use special ways to make readers feel sorry for these characters. In *The Doll’s House*, Mansfield uses simple, childlike words and shows the story through the eyes of a kind girl named Kezia. Kezia is the only one in her family who is nice to the Kelveys. This helps readers see how unfair the class system is, especially when even children are affected. The **doll’s house** and the **small lamp** inside it are symbols. They show something pretty and warm, which everyone should enjoy. But the Kelveys are not allowed to see it because they are poor.



Lahiri tells her story plainly and clearly. She lets us see Boori Ma's thoughts and feelings. Boori Ma keeps telling stories about her past life. Maybe they are true, or maybe not. But they show she wants to feel proud and respected, even if her life is now complex. Lahiri also uses symbols. The building stands for safety and importance. Boori Ma guards the building, but she has no home. She sleeps in the hallway and carries her things in a bundle. This shows the unfairness that she protects others, but no one protects her.

The two stories end in different ways. *The Doll's House* ends with a small moment of hope. Kezia lets the Kelveys see the doll's house. This shows that being kind can break unfair rules, even briefly. It makes us think that the younger generation can make the world fairer.

But *A Real Durwan* ends sadly. Boori Ma is blamed for a stolen sink. No one checks if she did it. They throw her out of the building. She loses the only place she had to live. No one helps her. She walks away alone, highlighting the extreme **vulnerability** of people without support or power. This shows how poor people are often blamed and then forgotten.

In both stories, poor people are treated unfairly. But the endings feel different. One gives us a small bit of hope, while the other shows the hard truth that many poor people live with every day.

## Conclusion

This Research article talks about how people are left out or poorly treated because of their caste or class in two short stories. These stories are *The Doll's House* by Katherine Mansfield and *A Real Durwan* by Jhumpa Lahiri. Both stories show how sad and unfair it is when people are not treated equally. This happens because they are poor or belong to a lower social group. The stories use the characters of the Kelveys and Boori Ma to show how society is unfair. People at the bottom suffer the most because of this unfair system.

In *The Doll's House*, Ibsen shows how even kids learn to mistreat others, like adults do. The Kelveys are nice and gentle. But others don't include them because their family is poor, and people look down on them. The doll's house in the story shows this unfair divide. It is pretty, and all the kids want to see it. But the Kelveys are not allowed. Only Kezia, a kind girl, sees this as wrong. She invites the Kelveys to see the doll's house. This act shows that things can change, even if the world is unfair.

In *A Real Durwan*, Lahiri tells the story of Boori Ma. She is a poor older woman. She tries her best to live in a world that does not care about her. She cleans and takes care of the building. But the people there do not truly respect her. One day, something bad happens. The people blame Boori Ma even though they have no proof. They throw her out. This shows how people with power often blame the weak. Boori Ma is left alone in the end. This shows how badly poor people are treated by society.

These two stories are from different places and times. One is from New Zealand in the early 1900s, and the other is from modern-day India. But both show the same problem: People are treated unfairly because of their caste or class. These stories tell us this is not just a problem in one place. It happens all over the world. The characters are not just dealing with personal problems. They are hurt by big systems that keep some people at the bottom.

To end, *The Doll's House* and *A Real Durwan* show how caste and class divisions hurt people. They remind us that everyone should be respected. It does not matter if they are poor or weak. The writers, Mansfield and Lahiri, use simple stories to ask us big questions. They make us





look at our society. They ask us to think about how we treat people. And they show us that even small kind acts, like Kezia's, can help change someone's life.

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