

Chapter I

Life and Art of Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy

The scope of literature is very vast as it encompasses almost every aspect of life. It has emerged as a major mode of expression over the years and writers throughout ages have contributed towards its growth with their timeless creations. They have created revolutionary works of art which has galvanized the whole world. Art is a comprehensive term, as it includes various ways of expression, which are categorized as fine arts, performing arts, graphic arts etc. Literature, as a form of art has been instrumental in transforming society as it deals with issues relating to social, economic, political, cultural and linguistic importance. Writers have transgressed the borders of time and space in relating the accounts of human existence and their struggle for survival.

The domain which studies, investigates and reinforces the accounts of the social outcasts is called Subaltern Studies. Authors of the Post-colonial cultures have augmented subaltern archives with their dissertations of the ostracized. An assemblage of historians from South-Asia in the 1970s, led by Ranajit Guha worked together to apposite historiography of the previously occupied homelands. They have published several articles on minority histories which appeared in celebrated anthologies of Subaltern Studies. These write-ups have motivated the creation of an entirely new discipline which aims to create an inclusive national history.

Distinguished Post-colonial writers like Dipesh Chakraborty, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Gyanendra Pandey and the alike contributed with several write-ups concerning the subalterns who faced colonial as well as local aggressions. These writers created a kind of space for the subalterns in their literary exercises. Many of them were writing to provide a platform for the marginalized people to speak for themselves. They have written several essays which appeared in celebrated compendiums concerning people inhabiting the periphery.

The concept developed by the historians was later adopted as a mode of interpretation of literary works. Noted critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak talked about the muted voice of the weaker section in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Her elaborate commentary on the issue of representation of the subalterns, places her in the

league of writers who theorize the experiences of the relegated class. She relates the manner in which the Orientals are presented in a stereotypical way by the Western academic circle. Many such writers have emerged since, who have influenced the area by devoting their academic life in ameliorating the lots of the dispossessed.

Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy are two such authors who have made persistent efforts in providing agency to the neglected class by their academic and activist works. Both are writers of higher order who have made sincere efforts in tracking the lives of the subalterns in their writings. They have scripted the histories of the socially and economically consigned section of the social set-up in their works. They exhibit wonderful potential in championing the cause of the subalterns. They have opted for devoting their creative space in making a homogeneous society.

Mahasweta Devi enjoys a distinct position in the regional literary landscape for her immense contribution to the field of Bengali literature. She has a vast canvas of literary output which testifies for her creative genius. Devi is one of the most widely published writers of Bengal. She writes in Bengali and her translator Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak describes her as the best-selling author of Bengal. Having been born into an intellectually motivating family, Devi received the necessary impetus for advancement in her chosen field.

A reflection of her family pedigree confirms the extent of impact that shaped her thoughts and actions. Mahasweta Devi was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in the year 1926 to Manish Ghatak and Dharitri Devi, who were eminent personalities in their individual rights. Her father Manish Ghatak was a distinguished versifier and author who used the fictitious name, Jubanashwa. He had published numerous ingenious pieces which made him a prominent literary persona of the past. His notable works comprise a novel named *Kankhal*, a collection of short stories and two anthologies of poems titled “Sandhya” and “Shilalipi”.

Noted filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak was the youngest brother of Manish Ghatak, who won national and international acclaim for his celluloid undertakings. He won the Rajat Kamal award for his film, *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* (1974) which is set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement of Bengal. Mahasweta's mother Dharitri Devi was also an accomplished writer and a social employee who dedicated much of her time in sponsoring literacy among the poor people.

She also belonged to an artistic family, her brothers being prominent personalities who were renowned in various fields such as the noted sculptor Sankha Chaudhury and the

founder-editor of the *Economic and Political Weekly* of India, Sachin Chaudhury. Their actions and contemplations left a deep impression on the young mind of Devi. Their contribution with regard to the growth of her literary career remains unmatched. Having great artistic personalities in the family helped Devi in deriving the required enthusiasm. Regarding the influence of her immediate and extended family she says:

I was fortunate to be born in a family where both sides were liberal and Women were held in great respect. The women were terror, indomitable, fearless...and all received education. At home we were nine brothers and sisters...everyday was a festival, so much sharing. I don't see that now. This had a great influence on me, on my life. (Global Feminisms, 4)

After receiving elementary education in Dhaka, Mahasweta Devi moved to Calcutta with her family after the Partition and joined Shantiniketan as a graduate student in English Literature. She completed her M.A. after a long gap of seventeen years from Calcutta University and worked in Bijoygarh College affiliated to the University. She continued to work in the educational institutions until she involved herself in accumulating information relating to the experiences of the subalterns. She set out in collecting evidences of subjugation by conducting personal interviews of the people of underclass. She says that "since the 1980s, I have been vocal about the daily injustice and exploitation faced by the most marginalized and most dispossessed of our people."¹

She was briefly married to renowned playwright Bijon Bhattacharjee and has a son with him named Nabarun Bhattacharjee, who is also a writer of repute. The marriage didn't last long and the couple divorced in 1959. Her subsequent marriage to budding writer Asit Gupta also didn't work and she broke up with him later. But her troubled marital life never affected her art and she emerged as a better writer with each of her publications. She never let her personal life create any hindrance in deriving an eminence in her professional life.

Mahasweta Devi's literary career took off after her stint as a journalist and creative writer in Bengali weekly named *Suchita Bharat*, where she contributed articles under the pseudonym Sumitra Devi. Before that she tried her luck with various odd jobs like teaching in school, dealer in soap dyes, a failed exporter of monkeys and clerk in Post and telegraph

Department. She made desperate attempts to prove herself by engaging in different occupations.

Devi later directed all her efforts in relating the accounts of the ostracized members of the social system. She has successfully experimented with almost all the genres of literature like novels, plays, short story, essays etc. in her elaborate career, where she has depicted the brutality of the feudal society against the deprived section like tribal, Dalit and women. She has illuminated the realm of Subaltern literature with the exuberance of her immortal characters drawn from the marginalized class.

Arundhati Roy came into the realm of literature in the year 1997, when her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, bagged the coveted Man Booker Award for literature. The novel highlights the various ways in which the rights and privileges of women and untouchables are ignored. It is a path breaking work of fiction, where she narrates incidents of humiliation faced by socially distraught class of people. This novel made a survey of the injustice meted out to the lower category of people.

In addition to this acclaimed novel, she has published many works of non-fiction which include essays like *The End of Imagination* (1998), *The Greater Common Good* (1999), *Power Politics* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), and *An Extraordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (2004) among others. Her critical pieces were later assembled and published for a wide readership. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* is such an assemblage which includes her celebrated articles.

In 2006, she was conferred the Sahitya Akademi award for the collection of essays, which she declined to accept. Her essays have appeared in several reputed magazines and newspapers which have been published in several languages worldwide. Arundhati Roy was not nurtured like Mahasweta Devi in family environment as her parents were separated at a tender age of two and she had no contact with her mother and brother for a long time. She made it to the literary world with the help of her ambitious self.

Roy attributes her personal growth to "living as the child of a divorced parent and a mythical father among the smug Syrian Christians of south India – and also from leaving home at 17 and living on my wits."² She has single-handedly created a space for herself in the literary world. Unlike Devi, she nailed the creative realm all by herself without getting any support from her near and dear ones. She was all alone in her endeavor of making a space for

herself in the world of literature. She did not have any Godfather to help in her noble venture. She continued to struggle and struck gold with her very first literary exercise.

Arundhati Roy was born on 24 November, 1961 in the beautiful North .East Indian city of Shillong, Meghalaya to a Bengali Hindu tea estate executive Rajib Roy and a Keralite mother Mary Roy of Syrian Christian origin. The marriage was not a happy one and the couple parted ways when Arundhati was two. Roy then relocated to Kerala with her mother and brother for a brief period. The family then stayed with Roy's maternal grandfather for some time in Ooty, Tamil Nadu and when she was five years old, they moved back to Kerala again, where her mother started a school.

Roy attended school at Corpus Christi, Kottayam followed by the Lawrence School, Lovedale, in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. She then studied architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, where she met architect Gerard da Cunha. The two lived together in Delhi, and then Goa after marriage, before they broke up. Roy returned to Delhi, where she worked with the National Institute of Urban Affairs. Marital discord never affected her career as a writer. In fact, she blossomed as a writer after her separation. So, it can be said that though both the writers did not enjoy marital bliss, yet their respective careers never took a back seat owing to that. In fact, both of them emerged as better writers with each passing day.

In 1984 she met independent filmmaker Pradip Krishen who offered her a role as a goatherd in his award-winning movie *Massey Sahib* (1985). The two were later married and together explored the reel world with a television series on India's independence movement and two silver screen creations, *In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones* (1989), where she talks about her experiences as an architect student and *Electric Moon* (1992) which centers round a costly tourist cottage, in the wilderness of central India. It offers a critique of the gaze of the occidentals, who visit India with certain pre-conceived notions. She wrote screenplays for the movies in her short stint with the film world.

Roy also received attention for criticism of Shekher Kapoor's directorial venture named *Bandit Queen*, a film based on the life of lady Robin Hood, Phoolan Devi. She despised the movie for Kapoor's distorted presentation of the events leading to her life as a burglar. But Roy's association with the silver screen was short lived as disillusionment soon overwhelmed her and she left the glitzy world of showbiz. Then she took up several anomalous jobs including running aerobics classes. Roy eventually split up Krishen and

started working on her celebrated novel *The God of Small Things*, which was published in 1997.

Mahasweta Devi is an out and out critic of the social elites who constantly discriminate against the weaker class people. Her angst is echoed in her works, where she speaks about the ruthless exploitation of the subalterns by the upper classes. She paints a very gloomy picture of rural India which is ruled by landlords and the upper class people.

Most of her works are set in the tribal areas of Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and the protagonists are the ethnic people of these regions. While delivering her inaugural speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair, 2006 Mahasweta Devi stated that she believed that the real history is made up of ordinary people and she has taken the responsibility of portraying their longings and sufferings in her works. She says:

I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legend carried by ordinary people across generations....The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing. ³

These words of Mahasweta speak volume about the immediate source of her writings. Devi says that she derives stimulation from the common people's struggle for survival and has taken the responsibility of projecting their scuffle. Though the two writers explore the issues of the subaltern yet their subjects are different from each other. Mahasweta writes for the local people and upholds their issues but Roy is equally concerned about local as well as global issues. Regarding the treatment of native problems in Devi's writings, a detailed study of the works of the writers asserts the fact nicely.

Devi grew up at a time when the whole nation was going through socio-political turmoil like World War II, Quit India Movement in 1942, Bengal Famine in 1943, Partition and the Tebhag Peasant Movement. These events influenced her works greatly, and the perils

of the victims of these foreign and native hostility were manifested in her wide range of writings. She started her literary occupation with a biography of Laxmi Bai which is named as *Jhansir Rani (The Queen of Jhansi, 1956)*. This work initiated her journey in the world of literature at a very early phase of her career.

This is a transposed account of the woman ruler of the princely province of Jhansi, who fought against the British in the first war of Indian independence. Being unsatisfied with the anecdotal records, she trekked the remote areas of the Bundelkh and region in order to collect pertinent data to restructure the past with firsthand information relating to the exploits of the brave heroine. She left no stone unturned in presenting the exploits of the heroine of India's first war of independence. Her interpretation of Laxmi Bai placed the heroine in a high pedestal of the Indian freedom movement. She wrote it to commemorate the contribution of the brave queen in the freedom struggle of India.

This historical novel was followed by *Hazar Chaurashir Maa (Mother of 1084, 1974)* which is set against the backdrop of Naxalite movement of Bengal in the 1960s. The novel depicts the emotional journey of a traumatic mother named Sujata, who wakes up to the news of her son Brati's death who was a revolutionary. Sujata undertakes a psychological voyage where she discerns the pervasive socio-political system which is responsible for her son's death. This discovery is accompanied by her consciousness of growing detachment from the crooked society, her son had rebelled against.

After that, she started publishing one work after another concerning the lives of the subjugated populace, who faced constant aggression in rural as well as urban society. Each of her works are reflections of the anecdotes of heroic adventures of the tribal leaders, whose contribution to the social causes remained unreported in the larger narratives of the national importance. She explored her potential as an artist in comprehending the malfunction that took place in reporting their stunts in the monopolized discourses.

Between 1970 and 1980, Devi focused on the condition of ethnic people of her native land and penetrated the interiors of Eastern India for collecting archival and oral data relating to the aboriginal people. The aboriginals are the indigenous people like the Adivasis, Santhals and other hill and plain tribes who have been subject to acute marginalization and disdain. She made it an aim of her life to project the commotion of the native men of this land.

The tribes have been part of several mutinies that took place in the colonial times. They have been part and parcel of Indian culture since time immemorial. But their non-

inclusion in Indian historiography made her feel for upholding their sagas in her works. She made it her sole ambition to rationalize the works relating to Indian history by adding their tales of nationalist adventures. She spoke for these unsung heroes of our culture and made their contribution immortal.

She has been actively involved with the ethnic people and has highlighted their rich history and culture in her most of her narratives. There were many uprisings by the tribes and peasant community in colonial and post-colonial times which were ignored by writers and historians. The authors failed to theorize the accounts of the tribal movements in mainstream historical works. This led to the cognizance of Devi in reviving their glorious past which was otherwise ignored by her precursors. The colonial era witnessed several revolutionary acts of tribes occupying interiors of the land.

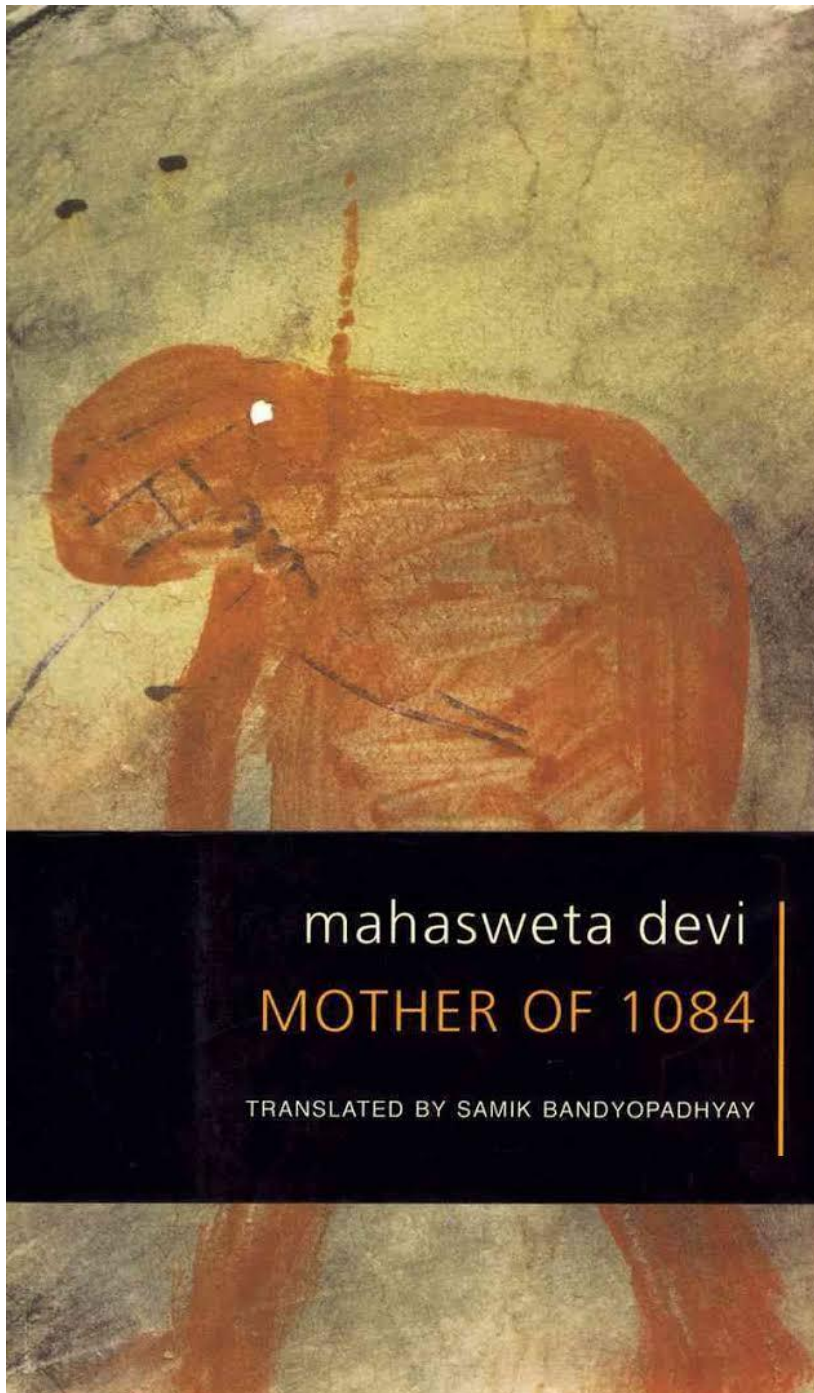
She conducted several interviews of the villagers in order to gather evidence with regard to the tribal way of live in the remote areas of the country. Moreover, interaction with her creative family members also added to the making of a classic artist that she is. She is gem of a writer who is way ahead of her times because of her association with the marginalized class.

Her work relating to the tribal masses begins with the celebrated novel *Aranyer Adhikar* (1978). Based on the movement of tribal hero Birsa Munda, the novel depicts the revolt of the leader against colonial and local violence in the forest areas. The revolution named 'Oolgulan' was enunciated by him in order to establish Munda Raj in the forest and hills. It is the story of the Munda tribe of Singhbhum, Ranchi, Chaibasa region of Jharkhand. He is a true pioneer, leading and marching with his associates in order to uproot colonial rule in the forest areas. These revolts were unreported and their heroes remained unsung. Therefore, she visited these lands and collected first-hand information of the tribal stars.

Devi narrates the manner in which he made desperate efforts to drive out the usurpers out of his home land. In *Chotti Munda evam Tar Tir (Choti Munda and His Arrow, 1980)* Devi recounts the rages over decades in the life of Choti Munda, in which India moves from colonial rule to independence. It was inspired by the life and activities of Dhani Munda, a skilled archer, who was a close aide of Birsa Munda. Their heroic deeds were stated by Mahasweta Devi in this story.

It traces the change in the daily lives of the marginalized rural public and raises important questions about the place of the tribal on the map of national identity. In

accounting this, he takes the tribal hero as protagonist and describes the way in which he crusades to emancipate the fellow tribesmen from the clutches of moneylenders, landlords and corrupt politicians. The exploiters were brought to book by the tribal hero, who was in turn revered by the professional author.



- *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi.

Courtesy: <https://books.google.com/books> about/Mother_of 1084

Bashai Tudu (1993), was also written to display tribal uprising against local proprietors. It is the story of a tribal peasant who fought for the landless farm laborers during crisis. In developing a new strategy of warfare, the protagonist resorts to the archaic ways of combat which adds to the mythical zeal.

Her interest in resurrecting India's past is reflected in her novel, *Titu Mir* (2000). The protagonist is a Bengali rebel who fought against the landlords and the British colonial authorities in Bengal during 19th century. He built a bamboo fort along with his followers to resist colonial invasion but succumbed to the injuries received during the fight with the British.

Dust on the Road (1997) is a collection of activist prose written between 1981 and 1992. It comprises of articles published in leading dailies and journals about the struggles of small peasants and bonded laborers. The volume also includes write-ups concerning the degradation of tribal life and environment. It is a non-fictitious account of the exploitation done by the higher authorities in order to maintain a life of superiority. It is an excellent version of the tales of subaltern subjugation and disdain. These articles registered a new platform as they comprised of the non-fiction works Devi.

Having successfully portrayed the ethnic past, Devi turned attention to the gendered subalterns who hold the lowest position in society. Devi wrote *Rudali*, in order to celebrate female resistance to counter social dominion. *Rudali*, by Mahasweta Devi is a revolutionary story of struggle and survival of its central character named Shanichari. It arrested the imagination of the intelligentsia and was later converted into a movie and a play.

In *Rudali*, Devi portrays the low caste woman as a victim of poverty and patriarchy. It is set in a remote village called Tahad which is situated in Rajasthan and revolves around Shanichari. She is a member of the underclass, and it is the story of her endurance in a class centered society. The novella offers a critique of the social, economic and political condition of rural India's backward class people. It pinnacles the exhausted condition of the rural community who are living in desperate poverty. The prose piece lends a dynamism to the practice of subaltern literature.

It highlights the depleted state of the village populace who are living in desperate poverty. *Rudali*, is a revolutionary story of struggle and survival of its central character named Shanichari. It attracted the fancy of the cognoscenti and was later adapted as a film and a drama. In *Rudali*, Devi portrays the low caste woman as a victim of poverty and patriarchy. It is set in a remote village called Tahad which is situated in Rajasthan and revolves around Shanichari.

The story begins with the description of repugnant socio-economic condition of the lower caste people inhabiting that village. The opening line speaks volume about the vulnerable socio-economic condition of the rural community: “In Tahad, Ganjus and Dushads were in majority. Shanichari was a Ganju by caste. Like the other villagers her life too was lived in desperate poverty” (71). They were living in acute poverty and faced constant maltreatment by the village proprietors who were members of the Rajput clan.

They were at the helm of affairs and dictated over the lives of the innocent villagers. They were tied down to the domiciliary of the upper caste ‘malik-mahajans’ and were not allowed to pursue education so that they don’t get opportunity to construct their individuality. They lived at the mercy of the economically potent class and shared similar fate of abuse and subordination. They did not have any right to speak against the torture inflicted by the aristocrats.

But Shanichari, unlike others, finds her place in the society by challenging the bodies of relegation. It is a story of her gradual movement from being a subaltern to a person who gets her voice at the end. It records Shanichari’s journey towards empowerment. She moved towards a more resilient self, which inspired other women of the village and they followed the path adopted by Shanichari in becoming self-sufficient.



- *Rudali* by Mahasweta Devi.

Courtesy: <https://books.google.com/books/about/Rudali.html?id=buq/mx>

In detailing Shanichari's ride from a powerless woman to a determined and self-sufficient woman, the story examines various issues like caste, poverty, hypocrisy and class relations. Ultimately, Shanichari transcends her impoverished position to become a self-reliant individual. *Imaginary Maps* (1995) tells the story of three tribal heroines who counter violence of the authorities in a feudal set-up. They pose a threat to the exploiters who make their living problematic.

There are several occasions where the privilege of the gendered individuals has found to be violated. The mindless venality of the landlords is exposed through the stories. The womenfolk are ruthlessly mortified and their modesty disrupted by the aristocrats. Their sexuality is owned and controlled by the village proprietors. Devi portrays the mindless corruption of the upper class people and their exploitation of the gendered subalterns.

Breast Stories (1997) is a cluster of short fiction which has a common motif, the breast. As Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak points out in her introduction, the breast is far more than a symbol in these stories. It becomes the harsh indictment of an exploitative social system. In *Draupadi*, the protagonist Dopdi Mejem is a tribal revolutionary who was arrested and gang-raped in custody, turns the terrible wounds of her breasts into a counter-offensive.

In *Breast-Giver*, a woman who becomes a professional wet-nurses to support her family dies of painful breast disease. In *Behind the Bodice*, migrant labor Gangor's statuesque breasts excite the attention of ace photographer Upin Puri triggering off a train violence that ends in a tragedy. The story caught the attention of international audience after it got its theatrical conversion. The portrayal of the protagonist by the leading lady earned much acclaim across the globe.

Outcast: Four Stories (2002) is an anthology of four essays which concerns the lives of four women namely, Dhouli, Shanichari, Joshima and Chinta, all from the most oppressed and marginal segments of society. Whether it is Dhouli, the young Dusad girl, who finds herself an outcast in her own village, Shanichari the Oraon girl who is forced to work in the brick kilns outside Calcutta, Josima the Ho tribe girl, who with her husband gets sucked into the racket of trade in cheap coolie labor or Chinta, a Brahmin whose caste offers no protection against the harsh social strictures which forces her to work as a part time maid in Calcutta.

The story of each of these women has one thing in common, the unending class struggle, caste and gender discrimination, which makes their lives a relentless struggle for survival. *Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants, and Rebel: Six Stories*, (1990), *Till Death Do Us Part* (200), *Old Women* (1999), are also written in the same tradition, where the author has depicted the struggle of women in making both ends meet in a ruthlessly exploitative feudal society. These collections accentuate the battle of survival of the low-caste women. A reflection of her works suffices the fact that she limits herself in the presentation of the perils of her immediate social circle.

Arundhati Roy is also a great sponsor of the relegated class who promulgates their issues in her host of fiction and non-fiction pieces. In a sharp contrast to Mahasweta Devi, she portrays the issues of the subalterns of the world. Though her first novel had a native setting, her subsequent essays has a global touch. Roy announced her arrival in the literary world with her novel, *The God of Small Things*.

Roy made a mark for herself in the literary landscape with the publication of her very first novel. The novel presents an interesting account of the ways in which women and the untouchables are maltreated in a caste-ridden, patriarchal society. The author has successfully tried her best to arouse pity for the down trodden and the defenseless. It offers a critique of the hegemonic institutions which naturalizes the subordination of the relegated class. She flings irony on the upper class rich people of society who persecute the subalterns in order to prove their superiority.

Roy identifies several agencies of power like patriarchy, Police administration, caste and religion, which exerts control over the marginalized section. She resorts to the retrospective method of story-telling for depicting the inconsistencies surrounding an Indian family. Her inimitable way of relating the events makes the work even more effective and makes her one of the most ruthless explorers of reality.

Roy emerged as a master story-teller, engaged with the task of relating the physical and mental worlds of her characters. She travels between past and present to tell a tale of inexorable impetus. The discourse of the story is built around the Kochamma family residing in a remote village of Ayemenem situated in Kottayam district in the state of Kerala. The story is told through the eyes of the 'Dizygotic' twins Estha and Rahel and it is more or less a discourse of the adult world with its discrepancies.

While detailing the events leading to a high-voltage climax dealing with the drowning of the twin's cousin Sophie Mol, Roy examines issues such as infidelity, caste-system, and religious orthodoxy with the serenity of the place at its backdrop. The story starts with the return of Rahel after years of absence from Ayemenem, where she spent her childhood. Roy then describes the way in which the mother of the fraternal twins, Ammu was maltreated by her alcoholic husband before she left him to join her family in Ayemenem.

There too she was an object of neglect because she married a Hindu man while she belonged to a traditional Syrian Christian family and "when his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem." (*The God of Small Things*, 42) Pappachi, the family patriarch dictated over the lives of his wife described as Mammachi and daughter Ammu, while son Chacko was saved as he was studying outside.

Mammachi's hypocrite nature is also revealed from the fact that she has absolutely no problem with his son who flirts around his employees at their factory named Paradise Pickles

and Preserves but has strong reservations against Ammu's inter-caste marriage. She wants her son to have all the pleasures and also makes provisions for the same. She also desires her son to become the owner of her sprawling business of pickle-making.

Chacko also suffered a broken marriage like Ammu, with his English wife Margaret Kochamma, who later comes for a vacation to Ayemenem after the death of her second husband, Joe. In the ultimate catastrophe, Sophie Mol is drowned while playing with the twins and Ammu's affair with the outcast Velutha comes to light. He is trampled to death by the authorities prompted by Baby Kochamma, and Estha is sent to stay with his father in Calcutta, while Ammu dies in a shabby condition.

It is observed that celebrated writer Arundhati Roy shows instances of gender discrimination in her acclaimed work. She depicts the manner in which women are deprived of their fundamental, natural and social rights as individuals and citizens of a democratic nation. The gloominess of the societal realities is articulated by Roy in a vivid manner. Arundhati Roy creates a world of women which is pervaded by male-chauvinistic ideologies. The women of Ayemenem never come out of the world which is ruled by males.

The Algebra of Infinite Justice is a collection of essays published in 2011 by award winning writer Arundhati Roy. Two more essays were included in its revised edition in 2002 to make it a compendium of eight political treatises. After the success of her first novel, she shifted focus from imagination to archive in order to tell sagas of relentless socio-political momentum.

Each essay is a statement in itself where Roy expresses her views regarding issues of regional and global importance like Nuclear Disarmament, Rapid Industrialization, Environmental and social delinquency of big Dams etc. She declined to accept the Sahitya Akademi Award conferred to her for her outstanding contribution to literature to express solidarity for the dispossessed.

The assemblage starts with "The End of Imagination", where Roy critiques Indian Government's policies on Nuclear weapons. And in Roy's non-fiction works the author gives account of her views regarding Globalization, Nuclear Disarmament, and Terrorism etc. The essays which trembled the intellectual world with their authenticity are *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good* which were written on contemporary issues like India's possession of nuclear weapons and construction of dams in the river Narmada respectively.

The former essay is a take on India's nuclear tests, where she condemns the tests on the ground that it is a threat to humanity, while the later essay is a result of Roy's involvement with the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a movement against the construction of Narmada River Dams. She speaks against the construction of big dams to improve the lives of some people at the cost of the marginalized.

It is a take on India's nuclear tests, where she condemns the tests on the ground that it is a threat to humanity. Arundhati Roy has paid equal importance to the issues of indigenous people in most of her works. She utilizes her star power to make radical changes in the lives of the underprivileged people of her nation. Her activist works are known to everyone and she amazes every time she comes up with her works reflecting social concern. She remains an important exponent of the realm of the subalterns. Roy never hurries to complete her works concerning society, politics, culture and nature. She took almost twenty years to come up with her second novel, which is a treatise on the contemporary socio-political situation of the nation. She takes time to cook up the characters, situations and events according to the taste of the present times.

She left her job as an architect as she did not feel comfortable making houses for the affluent class. She did not want to confine herself by designing housing complexes for those who earn profit at the cost of happiness of the have-nots. She says: "I graduated but I did not actually build anything, because I was not really cut out to be making beautiful homes for wealthy people or whatever"⁴

Roy very sarcastically remarks that in using these weapons our enemies are not China or Pakistan but mother earth itself. She is of the view that all the elements of nature will turn against us and the result will be horrible. Roy critiques the administrations for resorting to the use of the lethal nuclear artilleries in the name of war. She says, "India and Pakistan have nuclear bombs now and feel entirely justified in having them" (10).



- Arundhati Roy with Medha Patkar shouting slogans against the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam over river Narmada.

Courtesy: frontline.in

The second essay, “The Greater Common Good” is a result of Roy’s involvement in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a movement against the construction of Narmada River Dams. She speaks against the construction of big dams to improve the lives of powerful people at the cost of the marginalized.

She gives a detailed account of the threat posed by the projected dams to numerous inhabitants and biodiversity of the adjoining areas. “Their reservoirs displace huge

populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute. Ecologically too, they're in the doghouse" (57-58). Roy attempts to counter the myth surrounding dams that they are constructed for the progress of a nation and its citizens.

Whereas in reality, it is totalitarian venture as it is meant for providing conveniences to the privileged classes at the cost of the destitution of the poor. Roy later came up with a documentary entitled *DAM / AGE: A Film with Arundhati Roy* (2002) where she provided a graphic appropriation of the threat by the proposed dams. She attempts to prove that dams are a threat to the civilization and it hampers the progress of a nation by exploiting the subalterns. Roy describes her visit to the Adivasi villages, which will be submerged following the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the river Narmada. She also highlights the environmental inconsistency of the proposed dams in Gujrat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

In the next essay "Power Politics", she attacks Indian Government for its faulty policies on hydroelectricity. Roy is against the privatization of power as it will lead to more corruption. She refers to the Enron contract in Maharashtra in this context whose promise for electricity turned out to a huge scam. She said that the Maharashtra Government had to spend millions of dollars for inflated electricity which didn't procure desired result. She stresses on this fact for upholding the underlying motive of foreign agencies to extract money from the government purse.

Another powerful essay in the volume is "The ladies have feelings, so..." where she talks about the role of writers in society. She says that the writers should be responsible enough to take a stand on issues of socio-political importance. "To be a writer in a supposedly famous writer – in a country where millions of people are illiterate is a dubious honour" (189). She is against corporate globalization which, in her view will widen the gap between rich and poor. She terms it as colonization which will only relegate the position of the marginalized members in society.

The title essay of the collection, written in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on America, is a grueling political statement where the writer says that America has become victim of its own sponsored terrorism. "Someone recently said that if Osama Bin Laden didn't exist, America would have to invent him. But in a way America did invent him" (235). The next essay, "War is Peace" which is written in continuation of the previous essay deals with US invasion of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks.

The irony in the title comes from the US Government's attempt to justify its act of terror on Afghan soil. In "Democracy", Roy forms a powerful critique of the Gujrat riots which caused huge loss of life and property. The last essay of the book, "War Talk" sums up the arguments in the previous essays by giving a final talk on war and the devastation and destitute that follows it. These political essays have made her the much sought after writer of the contemporary times.

Arundhati Roy wrote her second novel charged with political contention entitled *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). It covers several decades to narrate the contemporary Indian socio-political scenario. It deals with dark truths of new history of the Indian subcontinent with topics ranging from Kashmir issue to Godhra riots, and the land reform acts that deprived the peasants. The novel resorts to the telling of every other political event that occurred in the recent past. She used magic realism in order to show the restlessness of the contemporary world.

Roy's story revolves around Anjum, a hijra³ who is again born as a man named Aftab, and Tilottama, an educated architect who elopes with one of the adopted children of Anjum. The novel also tells the tale of Tilottama's romantic involvement with a Kashmiri man named Musa, whose family members became victims of persecution of the Indian Army. Diverse narratives are woven into one, like the appearance of Prime Minister and the Naxalites. And finally Anjum and Tilottama are united in a surprising manner.

Arundhati Roy is an inextricable mix of a writer and an activist. She has rattled the dogmatic world with hard hitting political treatises meant for redressing the concerns of the subjugated populace. But her recognition in the urbane world doesn't rest on her writing endeavors alone. Her accomplishment as an author is complemented by her works as an activist. She has taken active part in many protest rallies that assisted in creating a more accurate world.

Ms. Roy has been part of many campaigns launched for the betterment of the subalterns. She has been awarded with the Lalan Foundation Cultural Award in 2002 for her work relating to civil societies which are affected by the world's autocratic monopolies. In addition to this she was also conferred a special acknowledgement as a Woman of Peace at the Global Human Rights award in San Francisco in 2003. Arundhati Roy is also the proud recipient of the Sydney Peace Price in 2004 for her unremitting work as a patron of the poor.

Apart from being a skilled artist, Mahasweta Devi is also recognized in the intellectual world as an activist. Her art of writing is complemented by her activist undertakings. Her works are influenced by social concerns to a great extent. Devi has spent her life in the wilderness of Eastern India, collecting archival and oral data relating to the social outcasts. She has voiced her concern by writing extensively about their exotic existence. She has provided every detail of the tribes inhabiting the central part of India.

Mahasweta was propelled to project the constant mutilation of the tribal after witnessing their appealing condition in her visit to the Palamu district of Bihar. Devi's visit to Palamu, a remote and extremely poor district in Bihar, proved to be a turning point in her life. It brought her face to face with the dismal conditions being faced by the indigenous people of Palamu. It is one of the most underdeveloped parts in India without any privilege of the modern world.

There was no education, no healthcare, no roads, and no means of livelihood. People were reduced to a subhuman existence. It was a vicious combination of 'absentee landlordism, a despoiled environment, debt bondage and state neglect.' Her Palamu experience propelled her towards what became the main focus of her subsequent writings. She now concentrated all her literary energy in exposing the dismal living conditions of the tribal people in India, to highlight their social exploitation and in the process she became a champion for their political, social and economic advancement. In a candid interview with Sunil Seth, she shared the details of her observation of the bonded labour system:

I went there in the 1960s and I saw this horrible custom of bonded labour. There was a man who was bonded to a rich farmer. I saw a bullock cart stacked with paddy. The bullock could not pull it and it crashed. So the rich farmer forced the bonded labour to pull the cart. While attempting to do this, this labour broke his shoulder. I asked the rich farmer how he could do such a thing. He said to me that his bullock had cost him Rs.2000, but this man is here, he is only a bonded labour. (77)

For Mahasweta Devi, writing was a sort of activism as she portrayed their longings in her writings. She was moved by the impoverishment of the bonded laborers who lived at the mercy of the powerful proprietors. In 1980 she started editing *Bortika*, where laborers,

factory workers, tribes, could write. This Bengali periodical was a revolutionary step by Devi, where she provided a stage to the people of underclass to tell the stories of their physical and mental agonies.

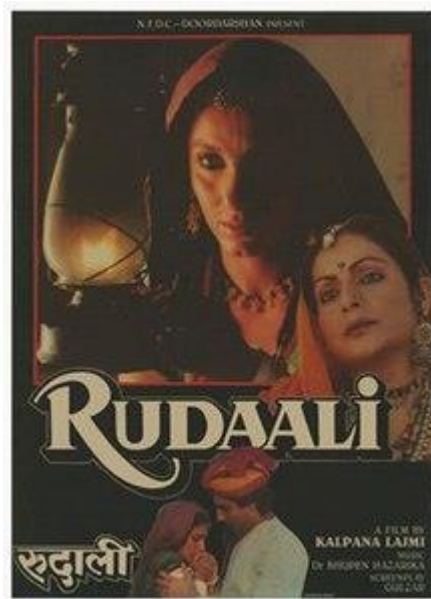
Devi has been awarded with several national and international awards for her outstanding contribution to the field of literature. She has received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for her novel *Aranyer Adhikar*, Padma Shri, for her work for the dispossessed in 1996, Jnanpith Award– the premier literary honor from the Bharatiya Jnanpith in 1997, Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and the Creative Communication Arts in 1999, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), 2006, Padma Vibhushan– the second peak civilian award from the Government of India in 2010 and Yashwantrao Chavan National Award.

Mahasweta Devi's love for celluloid adaptation of her works can be seen in the manner in which many of her novels have been recreated in the silver screen like *Sungharsh* (1968) which is based upon a real incident. It presents a dramatized version of reprisal in the holy metropolis of Varanasi. Directed by Harnam Singh Rawail, this film is inspired by Mahasweta Devi's *Layli Asmaner Ayna*, with Dilip Kumar, Vyjanthimala, Sanjeev Kumar and Balraj Sahni in lead roles.

The film *Rudali* (1993), starring Dimple Kapadia, Rakhee and Anjad Khan in lead roles is based upon the novel by Mahasweta Devi of the same name. Helmed by ace director Kalpana Lajmi, the movie was nominated as the Indian entrance for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 66th Oscar Awards, but was not accepted as an entrant. It got love in the international circle also as it traces the voyage of a subaltern woman in search of her identity.

The name is an allusion to a tradition in certain parts of Rajasthan, where womenfolk of an inferior social group are employed as qualified grievers, who wail upon the death of upper-caste fellows. They are professional wailers who grieve the demise of others in exchange of food and money. They take up this profession in order to earn a means of livelihood for their near and dear ones.

These females are referred to as a rudaali⁶. Their job is to publicly express grief of family members who are not permitted to display emotion due to social status. They were engaged by the landlords to express grief on their behalf, as they could not display their emotions publicly. It was their medium of earning livelihood.



- Dimple Kapadia as Shanichari in Kalpana Lajmi's *Rudali*.



- A still from the film *Gangor* which is based upon Mahasweta Devi's *Behinde the Bodice*.

Courtesy: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fib:Rudali>. Jpg.

The movie is a landmark in the history of Indian cinema because of the performances by the accomplished actors. This directorial venture of Kalpana Lajmi is lauded by movie lovers and critics. The film has become immortal because of the enthralling numbers. So, it can be said that the film adaptation of this epic novella also garnered equal respect just like the parent version.

Maati Maay (2006) is based on short story, *Baayen*. It tells the tale of a young lady who gets stuck between the exigencies of responsibilities directed by society and her own instinctive desires. Helmed by Chitra Palekar and starring Nandita Das and Atul Kulkarni in pivotal roles, the film won the heart of people. Another story of Mahasweta Devi which was made into a feature film *Gangor* (2010) from the Book, *Behind the Bodice*. Directed by Italo Spinelli, the film was set in the interiors of West Bengal. This film won many awards for heart-warming performances by actors like Priyanka Bose, Adil Hussain and others.

Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa (1998) is an Indian feature film that deals with the life of a woman who loses her son, a Naxalite to the violence that is a result of his adopted ideology. Directed by Govind Nihalani, the film has been taken from Bengali novel *Hajar Churashir Maa*. The movie centers around the small world of a woman named Sujata, who goes on a sabbatical after her son's death resulting from his involvement in the anti-government revolt of the Naxalites. The film has many known faces like Jaya Bachchan, who played the role of Sujata Chatterjee, Anupam Kher as Dibyanath Chatterjee, Milind Gunajias Inspector Saroj Pal, Seema Biswasas Somu's mother, Joy Senguptaas Brati Chatterjee.

But Arundhati Roy is not in favour of converting her novel into film. In an interview with N. Ram, Arundhati Roy says that she is too much in love with the characters of the novel to see them in a feature film. She is of the view that cinema will not be able to do justice to the vividness required in describing the incidents of the novel. To quote her,

I was feeling a little confined by the 'externality' of cinema. I wanted be free to write from within, from inside people's hearts and heads. I wanted to write a whole page describing the moon and the trees in the river, not Just have to write Scene 21. Ext. Night. River. Perhaps because I was a screen writer, I set out to write a stubbornly visual but unfilmable book. (22)

Her brief association with the glitzy world in the first phase of her career made her realize the limitations of this medium of art. The above analysis of Arundhati Roy's celebrated volume establishes the fact that she has deep concern in her heart for the dispossessed of the world. Her works in the non-fiction domain speak volume about the fact that she attempts to establish grounds for the marginalized to express their opinions.

Roy has written many political essays in her elaborate career and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* tries to assemble those by adjusting them in the celebrated volume. Arundhati Roy is also an activist who works tirelessly for ameliorating the lot of the dispossessed members of society. She is a part of several campaigns which works for the upliftment of the poor and the present collection is an academic assertion of her noble works.

Both Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy are social activists in their own rights. They enthusiastically participate in activist works which are meant for the upliftment of people. Mahasweta Devi has spent her life in living with the social outcasts. Both Devi and Roy are social activists, who have always stood for the rights of the marginalized. Activism imparts exclusivity to their status as writers and makes them ahead of their counterparts.

And as an activist, Arundhati Roy is also a name to reckon with, as she has campaigned along with activists like Medha Patkar against the Narmada Dam Project, saying that it will displace half million people. Both the writers have tried their best to liberate the downtrodden section by giving them power of speech. The role of the authors as social activists has complemented their art of writing in a wonderful and magnificent manner. They have remained magnificent contributors of subaltern scholarship and their works attest this fact very fervently.

Her work as a social activist has made her a chronicler of contemporary culture. She mocks the administrative system which targets the subaltern people. She critiques the ruling machinery for abusing the rights of the poor in the name of development. Roy also takes a tough stand against foreign governments for intruding other lands and belittling the locals. She proves her empathy for the subjugated class in her writings as well as in her activist ventures. She participates in several rallies for the promotion of the privileges of the subaltern class.

Arundhati Roy is undoubtedly an artist of the language and her supreme art lies in her psychological study of human characters. She presents the historic and observed facts in detail. A study of the fictional world of Roy suggest that she portrays the traditional and

orthodox milieu of Indian society. Her characters are larger than lives and represent the diverse nature of the Indian culture.

She has managed to make a characteristic reading of the native people's psychology. Her objective is to talk on behalf of the segregated communities of the nation who had to pay a hefty price for the sake of the nation's development. Roy remains a global figure in narrating tales of exploitation all over the world.

The writers have formulated an exclusive realm for those people who cannot adhere to the traditional mores of aristocratic classes. Their artistic endeavors are rewarded by national and international agencies. The two authors are torch bearers of modern arts, which respect all categories of people. Their literary nuances will have a lasting effect on the realm of subaltern literature. They have maintained this attitude of love and compassions towards the neglected people of their instantaneous and protracted world.

The whole project is a mirror reflecting the experiences of the subalterns. It tells the tale of cruelty practiced by the aristocratic people and how it affects the downtrodden section. It is a work which is manipulative, hard-hitting and compelling enough to invite further critical inquiry and investigation. It is suggestive of a society which is not based on terms of equality, hence has enough space for imaginative excesses. Moreover, it will inspire more research in this area which has immense readership in the contemporary times.

Notes

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