

## Chapter II

### A Subaltern Reading of the Works of Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy

Subaltern Studies, an off-shoot of Post-colonialism, explores the lives of underprivileged masses of society. It critiques the manner in which the dominant groups exert control over the socially, politically, economically and geographically marginalized people of a culture. It provides the ignored classes with a scope of academic assertion of their identities and ideologies. Subaltern classes include peasants, working-class people, women and other such groups who are denied agency by the dominant establishments. Subaltern Studies has taken its place as a major critical discourse in humanities in the last decade. And it has maintained a steady graph of growth since its inception in the late twentieth century.

It is used in various academic disciplines such as History, Sociology, Anthropology and Literary Criticism, as a method of intellectual enquiry. It has emerged as a pivotal mode of interpretation of various agencies which involve in configuration of the society in favour of the socio-political outcasts. Subaltern studies helped in the creation of literary space for the marginalized section of society. The practitioners of subaltern studies group formed an association of providing ground for the marginalized class to speak for themselves. They aimed at a merger of the history of struggle of the subaltern groups with the historical narratives of the nation.

The term 'subaltern' is a derivative of the contrivances of Italian Marxist decrier, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who used it in order to delineate the plebs, who are controlled by conformists. Gramsci is best known for his theory of 'cultural hegemony', which designates the way in which government uses ethnic bodies to enforce control in commercial cultures. He was an instituting member and principal member of the Communist Party of Italy, who was cramped by the Fascist rule of Benito Mussolini. Gramsci's 'imprisonment by the fascist illustrates the extreme measures a ruling group will undertake in attempt to protect its authority and hegemony in civil society' (*Gramsci cannot Speak*, 7)

His work also heavily influenced intellectual discourse on popular culture and scholarly popular culture studies in which many have found the potential for political or ideological resistance to dominant government and business interests. He tried to comprehend the contextual elements of subaltern history and has also emphasized on the various

challenges encountered during compilation of subaltern past. Regarding Gramsci's idea of subalternity Kylie Smith writes:

In strictly political terms, the Gramscian concept of subalternity applies to those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power. In Gramsci's time these groups were easily identified, and much of the work around the concept of subalternity has centered on groups like peasants and proletariat. (*Gramsci at the margins*, 39)

In Post-colonial literary theory, this term is used to describe that group of people in a society, who are at the margins. It refers to any person of inferior rank whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. The word is often used to describe the minorities like "dalits, tribals, refugees, colonial subjects, the illiterate, helpless women and children whose voices have been muted"<sup>1</sup>. They face relegation and discrimination at the hands of the economically potent members, who exclude them from the social structure. Subaltern Studies attempt to protect the identity of such groups who are subject to acute marginalization and disdain.

Subaltern Studies was introduced to the Post-colonial literary theory by some South Asian historians in the early 1980's, who used the terminology to describe the deprived people of the colonized countries. This collective of intellectuals is known as the Subaltern Studies Group and the objective of this group was to promote and protect the culture and identity of marginalized members of the colonies. They wanted to promulgate the issues of the subalterns and advocate their concerns.

The group formed by Ranajit Guha includes critics of eminence like Eric Stokes, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Pandey, Gyan Prakash, and Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak among others. They formed the major group of contributors who paved way for the formation of an inclusive national historiography. These writers made deliberate attempts to arrange a platform for the proletariats, who otherwise remain silent. Their deliberations helped to make an archival union for the subalterns.

Guha is a historian who influenced the emergence of Subaltern Studies and also the editor of many of its publications. His book named *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1999) is a classic of the kind, meant for the retrieval of

subaltern histories. It explores the common elements of rebel consciousness during the colonial period. The book describes the impacts of colonialism from the view point of the peasants. Subaltern Studies is a follow-up to the seminal book which confronted hierarchal historiography. Guha later maximized his efforts of academic inclusion of subaltern history by forming the group. It reformed the way stories of struggle were related by former historians.

Eric Stokes is another name to reckon with, as he is one of the foremost writers to make a visible impact on Indian historiography. His contribution to the area which concerns itself with the representation of the dispossessed is immense. Stokes is also a south Asian historian who enriched the domain of Subaltern Studies with his acclaimed works *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* and *The Peasant Armed: Indian Revolt of 1857*. Both the works are masterpieces as chroniclers of India's freedom struggle.

These books were written from the standpoint of the peasants and described their armed struggle against the colonizers. They acknowledged the contribution of the peasant class in attainment of India's independence. The former book played a major role in exploring the history of the South Asian nations. He worked very sincerely for incorporating the discourse of the scuffle of the peasant class. His works reflect the noble intention he had for the native sons of the soil.

He delves deep into the peasant agitation that changed over time during the colonial times. While in the later book, Stokes focuses on the first war of independence. He highlights the contributions of different peasant groups towards the making of the revolution which changed the course of Indian freedom struggle forever. He presents assistance of the agitators of grassroots level, whose offerings were neglected by the historians. The peasants were highly protective of their lands and tried to retain its ownership in every possible manner.

Dipesh Chakraborty is also an influential member of the collective, who made major contribution in assimilating the ideologies of post colonialism and historiography. He has edited and co-edited some issues of the famous series. Before that he published books like *Provincializing Europe*(2000), written in continuation of *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940*(1989) which is a treatise on working class History. He says that contemporary postcolonial theory does not adequately represent the aspirations of the people

of a former colony, with diverse experiences. He figured out the limitations of such historical narratives which does not recognize the rustic practices.

Another indispensable member of the group is renowned critic Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, who is best known for her translation of Jacques Derrida's *De la Grammatology*. It was Spivak who talked about the gendered subaltern for the first time in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She has problematized the idea of female representation in her works. Chakraborty is an eminent writer, scholar and critic of Indian origin. She is regarded as a great postcolonial writer, who sponsored the cause of the subalterns in her works.

She questions the use of Occidental glass in examining the Oriental others. She argues that instead of interpreting the other from their perspective, they should try to understand their position. In her acclaimed essay, she speaks on behalf of the subalterns but in doing so she victimizes the subalterns. The study reveals the fact that Subaltern Studies was developed by these writers who were driven by their desire of accentuating the marginalized section in their works.

The group was formed to counter the elitist narratives which were written with total disregard to the histories of the subalterns. The aim of the group was to rewrite Indian historiography by incorporating the accounts of the dispossessed. It published several anthologies on history, politics and culture written from the perspective of the subalterns. Its underlying purpose was to reconstruct the written past in favor of the relegated class. In Subaltern Studies, hegemonic demarcation is challenged by establishing grounds for the marginalized class to speak. Dipesh Chakrabarty highlights the purpose of the Group in his essay, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts". He says:

Its explicit aim was to write the subaltern classes into the history of nationalism and the nation and to combat all elitist biases in the writing of history. To make the subaltern the sovereign subject of history, to stage them as agents in the process of history, to listen to their voices, to take their experiences and thoughts seriously- these were goals we had deliberately and publicly set ourselves. (475)

So, it can be said that the body was formed with an intention of providing speculative justice to the subalterns. They were hailed as important agents of social and political change.

All the editions of the Subaltern Studies were devoted to the benefit of the non-elites in authenticating their pasts.

The Group has also inspired the formation of similar assemblage as the Latin American Subaltern Studies, founded in the 1990's in an attempt to redefine the socio-cultural identity of Latin-American countries. In the celebrated book, *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (2001), Walter D. Mignolo speaks about the source of inspiration behind the formation of the Group. He says:

During the 1970s when Ranajit Guha and various collaborators were formulating the South Asian project in response to the postcolonial situation in India and South Asia, a similar concern was being attended by Latin American intellectuals.(34)

This book is a landmark in the Subaltern history of Latin America as it espouses the interests of the poor by sympathizing with their strain and struggle. The volume privileges the category of the subalterns over the influential by investigating 'history from below'. Similarly, the suppression of the African-American people has also been recorded by writers across generations. They faced racial oppression at the hands of their white masters. The historical marginalization witnessed by them is stated in their works.

Langston Hughes was an African-American writer who is well known in the literary circle for his works related to Harlem Renaissance, which is a socio-cultural ferment that occurred in Harlem, America in the early part of the twentieth century. The moment was initiated in order to awaken the black consciousness for their rights through artistic endeavors. He developed a new technique of writing poetry which is known as jazz poetry through which he delineated the subjugation of black people. His celebrated poem *Dream Deferred*(1951) talks about the disastrous consequences of abandoned dreams in their society.

Another writer who richly contributed to the development of this genre of literature is Toni Morrison. She has made wonderful impact towards the emancipation of the colored people. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, she played a major role in proliferating the status of African-American literature. With novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1999), *Sula* (1973) and *Tar Bay* (1999), she established herself as the leading documenter of black experiences. She was even awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 for her significant works relating to the

emancipation of black subalterns in America. They faced the aggression of the white people for generations and she took the responsibility of recording their tales of loss and despair.

Zola Neale Hurston was also a writer of the same genre, who made extraordinary attempts to portray the struggles of the black people in American soil. She was also a striking figure of Harlem Renaissance. She depicted the struggles of the black people of South America, where the practice of slave trade was rampant. She makes a critical inquiry into the functioning of a society which rampantly performs the evils of trading slaves from one part of America to another.

She has written many short stories, essays and novels which served as platform for raising slogans against the exploitation done by the whites on the ground of racial superiority. Her best known work is *The Eyes were watching God*(2006) where she explores the gender roles prevalent in their society and the treatment of black woman by man. Here the characters search for her identity as an emancipated woman. They want to establish an exclusive arena for the fair sex populace. This remarkable novel is prescribed in the syllabus of several institutions owing to its resurgent nature.

Alice Walker is also a writer and activist of America, who works for the rights of the people of black community. She has written many books, articles and essays out of which the most famous is *The Color Purple* (1992) for which she was awarded the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. She was also engaged in a civil rights movement in Mississippi. Her association with activist works makes her a famous leader of the marginalized black people.

In this novel, she depicts the plight of the black woman protagonist, who experiences subalternity in two phases. At first she becomes a victim of black patriarchal society and also faces persecution of the white community. She became a leading writer of black narratives where she portrayed their struggle for survival. She narrated their trouble-tales with great ingenuity and accuracy.

These writers have made desperate attempts to bring literature of the otherwise subjugated race to the mainstream. They not only created a space for black literature but also helped in maintaining a trajectory of development of the social, cultural, psychological and creative lives of the African-Americans. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Toril Moi, and Ben Okhri have depicted the life of black people in African context.

These African writers portrayed the destitution of the black subalterns who were segregated by white people living in Africa. They maintained a steady growth in their production of such extensive statements regarding the development of the black people living in different parts of the world. They have successfully drawn attention of the international community towards the exploitation of the people of African origin.

Noted writer and critic Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak popularized the term in her acclaimed essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'(1985), where she relates to the manner in which Western culture investigate the culture of the colonized countries. She critiques Western discourses for its stereotypical representation of the natives. Spivak questions those ideologies which determine the parameters of West's knowledge of the natives. The opening line of Spivak's essay in "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" defines the purpose of the Subaltern Studies Group.

She says, "The work of the Subaltern Studies group offers a theory of change." (26) Spivak is referring to the shift in the position of the marginalized class that the Group sought. Further in the essay she discusses the themes of the publications of the Subaltern Studies Group. She says "Subaltern consciousness as emergent collective consciousness is one of the main themes of these books." (25) So it can be said that their purpose was to create academic space for native expressions. It re-appropriated historical scholarship in favor of the demoted classes.

The purpose was to destabilize the prejudiced historical scholarships which neglected the pasts of the backward class people. They wanted to salvage historiography from the manipulation of the elites. Ranajit Guha has spoken at length about the authenticity of historiography in his essay, the "Small Voice of History". He says that government establishments determine the historicity of events. To quote him, "It is this ideology, henceforth to be called statism, which is what authorizes the dominant values of the state to determine the criteria of the historic." (1)

Guha expresses his displeasure over the authorities which control the historiography of societies. Critic Gyan Prakash is in all praise for Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* in colonial India (1983) for its attempt of deconstructing the narratives of the privileged classes. The scholars engaged with the task of re-appropriating Indian historiography from the perspective of the subalterns received the impetus from the Post-colonial theorists. The growth of Subaltern literature was the result of constant inspiration

received from Post-colonial critics, who interrogate colonial history in order to uncover the inconsistencies prevalent in the dominant discourses.

Post-colonialism is used extensively in academic and popular circles and can generally be defined as the immediate period after colonialism. As a literary theory, it deals with the analyzing of literature written in the previously colonized countries. It offers a challenge to the hierarchies prevalent in the domain of art, literature and culture, thereby creating exclusive identities of the previously colonized nation-states. It scrutinized the various literary exercises of the post-colonial states to validate the making of identity.

It is a rejection of colonizer's projection of the natives in their discourses and subsequent recognition of their own philosophies which were sidelined by the Eurocentric arrangements. Post colonialism as a theoretical approach, engages with task of revisiting the academic impositions in favor of creating space for the indigenous entities. It makes an attempt to create socio-political identities of the colonized subjects. It aims to ameliorate the condition of the colonized masses by representing them in their discourses.

It gives a theoretical response to the stereotypical representations of the 'Orientals' in the discourses of the West. In this context, Post-colonial critic Leela Gandhi says: "And in its best moments it has supplied the academic world with an ethical paradigm for a systematic critique of institutional suffering." (8) As a mode of critical enquiry it responds to the legacies of colonialism and subverts the same by uncovering the colonial ideologies implicit in the texts. Post colonialism recognizes and emphasizes the heterogeneity of the colonized places.

It is observed that post-colonialism has entered the domain of various disciplines and has developed different connotations, but in literature, it is used as a tool to unearth the possible elements of clout in the literary pieces. Edward Said's seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978) is considered to be the foundational book on which Post-colonial theory developed.

Said says that the concept of Orient was an ideological construct of the West, which he claims allowed suppression of the people of the East. He critiques the West's accepted idea of the Orientals in his acclaimed book. He talks about the West's image of the East and its formation of a stereotypical image. In this regard Said explains, "I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is a veridic discourse about the Orient." (Said, 6)



Another postcolonial writer named Franz Fanon developed a critique of Imperial occupation in his work *The Wretched of the Earth*(1961). He states that such kind of domination casts a bad spell on the socio-psychological life of the colonized. Fanon is of the view that revolutionaries should resort to the development of class consciousness of the working classes to survive. He says “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all dignity”. (9)

Post colonialism deals with the literature produced in the formerly occupied republics like Africa, Middle East, Indian Subcontinent, Caribbean and the Latin American states. Writers from these countries have richly contributed towards the formation of their national discourse by countering Western Scholarship. They felt the necessity of creating their cultural identities in the post-colonial world and did so, by representing themselves in their dissertations. The underlying desire was to project the heterogeneity of the ‘Oriental’ people and places by disrupting the monolithic representations of the West.

Dipesh Chakraborty, the celebrated historian and Post-colonial writer has spoken at length about the Indian context of Western representation in his acclaimed essay, “Postcoloniality and its Artifice of History: Who speaks For ‘Indian’ Past?” Chakraborty says that he is in favor of scripting India’s history, independent of Eurocentric writings which serve as meta-narratives. In this regard he says, “There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’ “. (8).

Post-colonialism which started as a literary movement is not limited to the sphere of literature alone, as it has pervaded the domain of different disciplines and has come up with several approaches and entities. And Subaltern Studies is one such body of work which appeared in the literary scenario because of the impetus it received from the Post-colonial theorists. It continues to be one of the important theories which promotes subaltern issues.

It was started by the authors of the Post-colonial nation-states in order to make the presence of the minorities felt. They challenged the histories which were hierarchal and re-appropriated historiography by writing it ‘from below’. Post colonialism, engages with the task of academic destabilization of those agencies which exert control over the socially backward classes. It pondered over the creation of an exclusively impulsive national history.

It tries to limit the authority of such establishments which dominate the weaker section of society. Post-colonialism started with the work of writers of the formerly colonized countries who challenged Western scholarships in their discourses. There are many such authors from the Indian subcontinent who responded to Euro-centrism by incorporating native elements in their works. This type of colonial control over the academic realm was challenged by some writers who cared for the creation of a new dimension to the writings after the colonial period.

Writers like Sarojini Naidu, Raja Rao, Rammohan Roy, and R.K. Narayan are credited to have portrayed Indian sensibilities in their writings by negating Western influence in the colonial era. In the postmodern times also there are celebrated writers who have projected the angst of the ignored members of the social order in their works. In Post-colonial India, there emerged a considerable number of authors who were committed to the cause of establishing the socio- cultural identity of India. They recorded their bitter experiences relating to subjugation in their works.

Another field of fiction-writing which developed in the lines of Post-colonialism is Dalit Literature. It deals with the literary texts that are written by the members of Dalit community, where they showcase their experiences of subordination in a caste based society. The writers explore the changing fortunes of the Dalits in contemporary Indian society. Dalit people from various Indian communities have narrated various tales of exploitation in their poems, articles, novels and short stories.

India being a multi-cultural nation has various caste, class, race, gender etc. and the discrimination done among people on the basis of caste is the theme of the Dalit Literature. In Indian society Dalit are social outcasts, who face constant relegation of the upper class people. Practitioners of Regional literature have written extensively for the emancipation of the weaker section of society. They try to form an identity for themselves and search for equality by challenging traditional beliefs.

It was Marathi poet and Human Rights activist Namdeo Dhasal who founded the Dalit Panther with friends in 1972, inspired by America's Black Panther movement. He is one of the recognized regional writers of the last century. Dhasal was an ardent follower of B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of Indian constitution. A section of his works was translated by Dilip Chitre, another writer of repute. His work has greatly influenced the literature of the marginalized.

Tamil writer Bama also writes in the tradition of Dhasal. She rose to fame with the publication of her auto biographical novel, *Kaukku* (1992) which chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu. Her works have always made headlines for the projection of the filthiness of the societal conventions. She is a true champion of the cause of subalterns. She caters to the need of the immediate society, which she is a part of. Many of her works reflect the perverse national culture with all its narrowness.

Before the emergence of these writers, Mulk Raj Anand talked about the outcasts in his works. He is a remarkable writer who worked for the subalterns. He is best remembered for his representation of the lives of poor people in conventional society. He was a prominent Indo-Anglian writer, who wrote appalling novels depicting the destitution of the depressed class. His main novel *Untouchable*, published in 1935 is a chronicle of the events of a single day in the life of Bakha, a toilet cleaner, who accidentally bumps into a member of the high class. *Untouchable* remains his most notable work concerning the lives of the subalterns.

It deals with the story of a sweeper boy named Bakha who lives in a colony designated for the outcasts. He encounters a series of embarrassing incidents which makes him think of emancipation from the wretchedness and humiliation that he suffered for being a member of the untouchable caste. Being a bright individual, his chances of improving his status in society is grim due to his affiliation to India's lowest social category.

It has a real life connection as it is based on the life of one of his aunt who was socially ostracized due to her act of sharing meal with a Muslim woman. The novel exposes the social taboo of untouchability in Indian society. It also explores the palpable effects of the social evil which was a challenge to the growth of a nation. The work penetrates the remotest arena of human psyche in depicting the anthropoid world.

His next work *Coolie* first published in 1936 cemented his position as one of the foremost writers of India. It is a critique on the British Rule and India's caste system. *Coolie* represents the class struggles that is present in the Indian society through the life of its protagonist named Munoo who suffers exploitation at the hands of his employers. In *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1994), he traces the dejection of Gangu, a Punjabi peasant who was employed in an unhygienic tea estate of Assam in colonial India. Gangu was ultimately shot by a British officer who also tried to rape his daughter.

Another writer of the pre-independence with subaltern consciousness is Raja Rao. In his novels, he tries to show the subtleties of Indian culture. His novels center on the rural areas of the nation. His novel *Kanthapura* (1967) is set in a South Indian village of the same name. It is a coming of age novel, where the protagonist being a Bharmin, harbors love and respect for the members of other castes. He is an ardent Gandhian and believes in the policy of ahimsa and equality. The novel ends with an optimistic note where the villagers look forward to gain independence for the country with a unified effort.

Contemporary writers who take interest in the world of the dispossessed are Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and Aravind Adiga among others. These post-colonial writers of repute have spoken about the marginalization of the weaker class. Amitav Ghosh writes for the deprived as in *The Hungry Tide* he presents an uneventful life of the people of sundarban. He makes a close study of the history of the place and the historical marichjhapi incident is presented there. Rohinton Mistry in his *A Fine balance* (1996) also talks about the deprived people.

Adiga, a former correspondent for Time Magazine whose articles have appeared in publications such the *Financial Times*, the *Independent* and the *Sunday Times* writes indiscriminately about the socio-political status of the nation. He is an insider talking about the social, political and economic condition of his own country. Adiga describes the appalling condition of the nation which hushes the working classes due to their poor economic state.

Set in the backdrop of the economic boom in India, the novel *The White Tiger* (2008) provides an account of the meteoric rise of the narrator, Balram alias Munna, from the son of an impoverished rikshaw-puller to a self-made entrepreneur in Bangalore. It is a study of the quest of the proletariat for liberation against the oppression and autonomy of their oppressors. It is a penetratingly satiric commentary upon India's class based society.

Adiga's revolutionary novel presents a repugnant picture of contemporary India with its class struggles, where members of the underclass are economically oppressed by privileged classes and have very limited means of improving their condition. It paints a very gloomy picture of India's economic realities and the magnitude of this darkness can be judged by the following words of Balram Halwai where he invokes the Gods to provide brightness and light to his dark story. He says: "So : I'm closing my eyes, folding my hands in a reverent Namaste, and praying to the gods to shine light on my Dark story." (9)

Amitav Ghosh is also an internationally recognized writer of Indian origin. He is often hailed as one of the most successful Indian diasporic novelists in America. Ghosh being an anthropologist, his novels capture the history and culture of the people of the postcolonial nation states. His novels *Calcutta Chromosome*(1996),*In an Antique Land*(1992) are travelogues concerning the lives of the people of South Asia. These works are landmarks in the history of English novel.

And in *The Hungry Tide*(2004), he explores the plight of the refugees settled in Sundarban. Ghosh reconstructs the history of the island by referring to a historical incident of Marichjhapi. He wants to restore history of the marginalized, who were denied proper representation. Their movement was disregarded while penning the history of the land. The novel also captures the lives of the central characters of the rural island and their relationship with the cosmopolitan world. It nicely creates space for the otherwise neglected populace of the Sundarbans.

Rohinton Mistry is an Indo-Anglian writer who has richly contributed to the bulk of literature produced in India. He is an Indian immigrant writer based in Canada and his works have a strong suggestion that he suffers the loss of homeland. He even went on to win the Man Booker Award for *A Fine Balance* in 1996. He is a member of the Parsi community that came to India in order to protect their religious and cultural identity which was under threat in their native land, Iran due to the Islamic invasion in the seventeenth century.

Though he basically highlights the destiny of the Zoroastrians who form a minority community in India, yet his concern for the lower classes is revealed in his acclaimed novel, *A Fine Balance*. He is a writer with empathy for the untouchables in India. In this novel, he creates a world surrounded by the lower caste people or untouchables. The novel portrays the plight of the cobbler class, who are generally not included in the mainstream society. It relates the plight of the people who belong to the lower strata of society.

The novel deals with the prejudices which engulfed Indian society since its very beginning. Here, he focuses on the chammars<sup>2</sup> who belong to the lower strata of society. It is a story of their struggle for survival in a society which restricts them to earn their livelihood in a dignified manner. The chammars leave the cobbling profession to become darjis<sup>3</sup> in the hope of getting a respectable life. They pursue this profession to free themselves from the shackles of untouchability. It reflects the kind of thought that is applied to affiliation to a certain profession.

He waves the fabric of the novel against the backdrop of emergency and economic turmoil in India. And the major characters “Ishvar and Omprakash, the chamar tanners the caste violating tailors; of Dina Dayal, the Parsi widow in search of economic autonomy; of Maneck Kohlah, the student from the hills hungry for existential answers.” (290) Mistry captures the overwhelming forces of history and caste, of politics and patriarchy that combine to break the human spirit in its quest for value.

Indian English Literature has touched great heights due to the mediation of a number of writers who have received worldwide recognition for excellence in their writing spree. The avenue started by the writers of colonial era has been efficiently handled by the authors of the post-colonial times. They have carried the legacy of the legendary writers forward by projecting the scuffle of the people of the post-colonial nation state, who were subject to socio-political turmoil.

The literature of the post-colonial societies is replete with the sagas of vehement exploitation of the ethnic people by those inhabiting the mainland. Subaltern Studies is one such domain which investigates the issues of the tribal population, who has been subject to acute marginalization and disdain. Their rights were violated by the autocratic rulers of the land and this type of desecration done to their identity is interpreted by the practitioners of Subaltern literature.

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. Their literary pieces are remarkable enough to evoke a sense of guilt in the minds of the urban populace.

They exhibit wonderful potential in championing the cause of the subalterns. Their works are reflection of their eventful lives, where they have essentially portrayed the repugnant tribal societies. Their artistic endeavors have received much reverence in the literary domain. A close study of their life and works will maximize their stature as artists. They also made efforts in radicalizing the domain by including the speakers of marginalized class to tell their tales.

The subaltern consciousness is thoroughly echoed in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*. It offers a critique to the existing social situation which differentiates among individuals on the

basis of their economic condition. *Rudali* is a powerful story of a subaltern's move from periphery to the center. From the analysis of the novella, it can be asserted that it is post-colonial in its nature as offers a sort of resistance to the domination of the upper classes. Her portrayal of a character like Shanichari shows the type of compassion she has for people of the unprivileged sector. In almost all her works Devi has taken a subaltern as her protagonist.

But the fact that makes her different from other writers of this genre is that her lead characters never submit to the existing norms and traditions. They rather challenge them in order to create a new social order. They make constant attempt to raise their position by intimidating the agencies which try to regulate their actions. This sort of confrontation which is highlighted in *Rudali* through the character of Shanichari makes the work post-colonial in its theme and treatment. It portrays the multifarious exploitative experiences of the protagonist.

Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* is set in the remote district of Tahad, which is ruled by landlords. The villagers lived at the mercy of these landlords who inflicted inhuman physical and mental atrocities. The protagonist Shanichari is a member of the underclass. The opening line of the novella speaks volume about the socio-economic condition of Shanichari and her fellow villagers. "In Tahad village, Ganju and Dushads were in the majority. Shanichari was a Ganju by caste. Like other villagers, her life too was lived in desperate poverty" (71) Thus, poverty was a shared condition among the villagers. Shanichari's financial condition was so grave that emotions dried up and she never shed a tear at the demise of her relations.

She got busy arranging their funeral services leaving her little time to mourn. Thereafter she was so much preoccupied with earning for the living members that she never managed time to weep. The magnitude of destitution of a low-caste woman like Shanichari can be mediated from the fact that the perils of life have overwhelmed her emotions to the extent that she never wept at the death of her relations. "Preoccupied with all this and with ways of keeping the stomach fed, Shanichari forgot to cry." (77)



- Mahasweta Devi in her study.

The Hindu-Oct, 18 2016. Sudipta Dutta.

In *Rudali*, the writer shows the appalling position of the people inhabiting Tahad village, who were required to work in the fields of the landlords like livestock in order to recompense their debts. The idea was to keep them tied to their households as slaves and not let their children attend schools so that they don't get scope to develop their potentialities. The following quote from the text throws light on the situation "It was not the amount that mattered- that was of less value than the dust of their shoes. What mattered was the yoke, the burden of debt that kept them laboring like cattle." (Devi 76).



The oppression and subordination of the frailer section seems to be a continuous process in the village of Tahad, as the new generation of landlords are only carriers of the legacy of exploitation exercised by their forefathers. Times have changed for the worse, as the new feudal lords are even more brutal in their approach and demeanor. The viciousness is embodied by Lachman Singh, the son of village landlord Ramavtar Singh who employed sturdy bodybuilders to keep the low-caste people at bay. He never shared any light moment with them unlike his father, as he considered this to be a mark of weakness. The following lines from the text will elucidate the condition:

Times have changed, and the maliks have changed with the times. Lachman Singh now employed muscle-men to keep the labourers, lower castes and peasants in line; mounted, armed musclemen. Ramavtar was given to kicking and Beating them with his slipper, but when in a good mood he would also chat with them. To Lachman Singh this was a sign of weakness. He preferred to keep his distance. (87)

The village people cooperated with each other in distress which helped them to survive amid growing despondence. The villagers often fought over petty issues just to keep themselves occupied in an otherwise despondent environment. The gloom was created due to the oppressive social system created by the landlords. They were at the helm of affairs and to do away with the frustrations of such manipulation, Shanichari and other villagers engaged themselves in brawls:

A fine fight was brewing. Shanichari was all set to enjoy herself. A good set-to cleared the brain, got rid of a lot of undergrowth. That's why Dhatua's mother literally quarreled with crows-quarreling kept both mind and body in fine fettle, the blood coursing through your veins like bullets from a gun.(85)

Such occasional fights kept them occupied in an otherwise murky life. Struggle of sustaining livelihood of surviving members of the family kept her so busy that she didn't get ample time to mourn their demise. When Dulan, a fellow villager influenced Shanichari to become a rudali, she at first wondered if she can become one, considering her past record of not lamenting the death of her near and dear one's. She says: "Cry? Me? Don't you know? I

can't shed tears? These two eyes of mine are scorched?" (Devi 91) But after being induced by him, she finally became a mourner, crying, wailing and rolling at the death of those upper caste populace of her village who had earlier neglected her. It was a spirited act on the part of Shanichari who finally proves her eccentricity by becoming a professional mourner. She is a valiant lady who arranges for the cremation of the members of her family.

She did not shed tear at the death of her husband and son Budhua as she was busy organizing their funeral. But, later on she made it her profession in order to survive in a world which is ruled by privileged class. She became a rudali, literally professional mourner in order to fill her stomach. Shanichri and Bikhni became famous rudalis, lamenting the death of the upper class people in exchange of food and money.

And afterwards, when she received the news of her friend and fellow mourner Bikhni she was devastated as it affected her occupation. She was never petrified at the loss of her family members but Bikhni's death made her anxious. She was not worried at the loss of her companion but she became sad thinking of the fact that her death would affect her earning. The following quote from the text explains the state of her mind:

Her husband had died, her son had died, her grandson had left, her daughter-in-law had run away- there had always been grief in her life. But she never felt this devouring fear. Bikhni's death affected her livelihood, her profession, that's why she is experiencing this fear. (Devi 114)

The hardship of life has made Shanichari very practical and she develops as a woman. She learns to live life on her own terms. She has given her life and services to her family but has got nothing in return. She lost her husband and son Budhua due to illness. Her daughter-in-law also deserted her soon after Budhua's death and her grandson Haroa also ran away with the magic-show people. But in none of these occasions, Shanichari shed tears. She was determined to find him out and wandered from one place to another. In one of these wanderings, she had a chance encounter with her childhood pal, Bikhni who also suffered similar fate.

When Bikhni states her misfortunes and says that her grand-daughter will terribly miss her, she consoles her by saying that "she will cry only for a few days. Then she will forget." (87) Like an experienced person she made her understand that the world is too selfish

to remember someone forever. Bikhni accepted Shanichari's invitation of staying in her place. She developed an instant liking for Shanichari's house and took control of the household chores. She took the charge of every minute household work related to cooking, cleaning, washing etc.

It provided her the necessary happiness after she lost her previous status in her own home after her son's marriage. Her daughter-in-law took the reins into her own hands but in this house she worked happily and relentlessly. She managed to make a safe corner for herself in the house of her childhood friend Shanichari. For her "managing a household is addictive. It can set even someone as unhappy as Bikhni to dreaming unrealistic dreams." (87)

Arundhati Roy also wrote about the subalterns of caste and class in her renowned novel. Arundhati Roy is also a great sponsor of the relegated class who promulgates their issues in her host of non-fiction pieces. Roy's novel also scrutinizes matters of caste, class and gender as that of Mahasweta Devi in *Rudali*. Roy announced her arrival in the literary world with her novel, *The God of Small Things*. It is her debut novel which went on to win the Man Booker Award of 1997.

Roy made a mark for herself in the literary landscape with the publication of her very first novel. Roy's ace novel *The God of Small Things* creates a space for the subalterns. It underscores the position of the marginalized members of Malayali society- the Paravans, a divorced woman with children from inter-caste marriage, a matriarch who endured regular beatings of her entomologist husband, the way she treated her son's ex-wife and many more. It made her a household name and her fame spread far and wide. The novel examines the various conditions under which a person can be maltreated by the authorities.

It managed to stimulate a strong response from the artistic world. It critiques the social conventions which divides people on the basis of caste and gender. Roy's semi-autobiographical novel illustrates the way in which the socially dispossessed members are treated by their superiors. The story which is told in flashback makes an interesting read. Arundhati Roy shows amazing awareness to the contemporary socio-political problems. The title of the novel is suggestive of the author's association with the plight of the marginalized members. Roy shows deep involvement with their problems in an orthodox society.

The writer Arundhati Roy begins the novel with a detailed description of the physical and social environment of Ayemenem, before delving deep into the nexus of the place and its people, their whims and fancies and finally the treatment meted out to the social outcasts. She

has very successfully outlined the fact that ‘the world had other ways of breaking men’ (9) and death does not only destroy a person. This thought came to Estha and Rahel in connection with the death of outcast Velutha who was killed brutally for being in a relationship with the socially superior Ammu.

After her divorce with her planter husband, Ammu came back to Ayemenem with her children, where she was neglected for having married a man outside the religion. The novel relates several instances where the ‘Big God howled like a hound and demanded obeisance.’ (8) They owed them allegiance of every kind. The superior section wanted their services relentlessly. They wanted to control the lives of the proletariats in every possible manner.

Even there were rules being laid down for the quantum and magnitude of love to be showered upon an individual. The Ayemenem society was conservative enough to accept their inter-caste marriage and those who indulged in it were segregated and looked down upon. They did not consider it to be an act of morality, hence they made their own policies of making relationships. “Love laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved and how much” (33)

She resorts to the retrospective method of story-telling for depicting the inconsistencies surrounding an Indian family. 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.

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 of her marriage to a Hindu man while she belonged to a traditional Christian family of Syrian origin: “Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel were allowed to attend the funeral, they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them.” (5).

And when her affair with Velutha, a low caste Paravan came to light, he was beaten to death by police officials instigated by her aunt Baby Kochamma, while Ammu later died in a shabby condition. The low-caste persons are looked down upon and their entry is restricted to the households of the ‘touchable’. The young twins are educated by Mammachi on the

matters of caste and class. She tells them about a time when the lower caste Paravans were not allowed to enter the house of upper caste people. A reflection of Ammu's father Pappachi's treatment of the Paravans can be used to comprehend the prevalent caste system:

Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time in her girlhood when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravans' footprint.(74)

They converted to Christianity after the arrival of British in Malabar, in anticipation of a better life. But little did they realize the futility of the move as their position did not improve. They had separate Church where separate priests performed the services. Moreover, they did not enjoy any government facilities like reservation for jobs, getting bank loans at low rate of interest etc. Velutha was an accomplished carpenter who could make little toys, and jewel boxes. He could also make boats very efficiently. He honed his skills under the apprenticeship of a professional named Johann Klein who conducted workshop with the local carpenters.

Velutha was also interested in machines and Mammachi often thought that he would have been an engineer, had he not been a Paravan. He mended radios, clocks, water-pumps. He also took care of all the plumbing and electronic apparatus in Ayemenem household. He has been prevented from becoming an engineer only because of his caste. Since he was an untouchable, it was not possible for him to go to school and attend classes along with the children of upper class people.

In fact, he even helped Chacko with his machines in his pickle factory. In fact, his father was not at peace with the ways of Velutha. Though he was not a rebel yet, developed the characteristics of a rebel. A study of the characters and situations of the two novels has established the fact that her works truly echo the sentiments of the dispossessed people of the nation. And she has always done that in her works of every kind.

Exploitation of children has been highlighted by both Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy in their novels. The ignorance of parents in matters of sexual abuse of children has also been highlighted by Roy. The sexual act of the Orangedrink-Lemondrink man raises several questions relating to a child's security. Estha is not able to protect himself from the clutches of his dirty exploiter. He remains in the anxiety of being exploited by him again, but continued to be silent due to the hypocrite nature of society.

It establishes the fact that a dispossessed child is unable to raise voice against his exploiter. The helplessness of a child as a subaltern member is portrayed by Roy. He even cannot tell his mother about the treatment meted out to him by that man. He is very scared of the consequences and feels guilty of himself. Estha suffered the sexual abuse alone, without telling anyone.

Having used Estha for his biological needs, he behaves very nicely with Ammu, giving her least indication of whatever has happened. And Estha's fear of his arrival in Ayemenem anytime and Ammu's offering him pineapple juice with ice makes him shiver with fear. It constantly haunted him for a long time. He even did not share it with his twin sister Rahel, with whom he was very close. He suffered inwardly to a great extent and remained quiet about it.

Devi also focuses on several questions relating to freedom of children in her short novel *Rudali*, through the character of Haroa, Shanichari's grandson. Haroa wanted to enjoy his childhood but his grandmother engaged him to work for the landlord. Though he was never happy with his work in the shop, yet he continued to work for some time until he ran away one fine day with a magic band. Devi portrays a society where children don't have any other choice but to submit to the authoritarian adult world.

The subalterns had each other's constant support which made them bear the undue circumstances of suppression. Both Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy have emphasized upon the strong bond between the oppressed, which makes them fight the subjugation. Such type of mutual cooperation is not seen among the upper caste zamindars<sup>4</sup> who even went to the extent of killing each other for their personal gains. They were not compassionate towards their fellow community members, unlike the outcasts who were sensitive enough to help each other in hour of need. In one of those instances:

Bhairab Singh had been found murdered by someone or a group of people. His body was found lying in one of his fields over which there had been a corrupt dispute for a while. Now it would be upgraded to a criminal case. The villagers always come to know everything. They soon knew that it was Bhairab Singh's eldest son who had killed him (88)

Bonding of the subalterns is witnessed in Roy's novel also. Estha and Rahel had undying love for each other. They were together in childhood and missed each other in their adult lives. Estha lived with his father and step-mother in Calcutta but Rahel earned a degree in architecture and got married only to be divorced. But they had undying love for each other which made them bear the pangs of the world. In this ruthlessly dangerous world the subalterns have the company of each other in protecting and promoting their rights. They are sympathizers of their position in a neck to neck competitive world. They have the healing touch of other subalterns which makes them feel secure in a highly subjective world.

Dulan was a well-informed man who acted as the savior of the villagers. He gave suggestions whenever Shanichari came to him for guidance. He provided her with the required knowledge and information for leading an economically independent life. He always had a piece of advice when approached by Shanichri for some kind of illumination. Dulan also speaks about the cunningness of the upper caste landowners who do not have time to mourn the death of their relations. The rich people can go to any extent in order to derive financial gains.

They rather engaged themselves in collecting their share. He upholds a true picture where a family member can kill another for monetary gains. He says: "In rich families, the son kills the mother, the mother the son. Forget about who killed whom. Amongst us, when someone dies we all mourn. Amongst the rich, the family members are too busy trying to find the keys to the safe. They forget all about tears." (90-91)

The hypocrisy and double standard attitude of the rulers is thus exposed by the writer. They don't pay any attention to a living person but for family honour they organize huge funeral services for them. They don't take care of their aged parents and relatives but spend "huge sums of money on death ceremonies, just to gain prestige." (96) They have false understandings of the cultural practices. They never paid attention to the living members of

their families. Instead of rendering filial duties, they concentrated on creating names for themselves.

Dulan then tells about the history of Tahad, which originally belonged to the Adivasis. In the course of time it was invaded by the people of Rajput clan who declared themselves as the rulers of the land. The Rajputs are soldiers of the then King of Chotanagpur, who ruined the land and ordered his battalion to take control of the surrounding areas, including Tahad. That is the story of the Rajput settlement in the village.

But Shanichari emerges as an evolved character at the end, who manages to manipulate the very system which inflicted injustice upon her. She refused to submit to the cruelty of the dominant class. She questioned traditional stance and didn't accept anything which is irrational. That is why, she countered the harsh remark of her mother-in-law where she blames Shanichari for all the misfortunes as she was born on inauspicious Saturday.

She refuted that statement in her mind by augmenting that the fellow villagers who were named after the auspicious days of the week were not happy either. She says "Because I was born on and named after a Saturday that made me an unlucky daughter-in-law? You were born on a Monday- was your life any happier?" (Devi 71) The villagers were made to work in the ground of the landlords. Mahasweta Dev depicts the plight of Shanichari who worked as a bonded labor in the fields of the landowners without proper wage:

...in order to appease Mohanlal, she was forced into debt to Ramavtar; she received Rs 20 and put her thumbprint on a paper stating that she would repay Rs. 50 through Bonded labour on his field over the next five years. (74-75)

Towards the end of the novella, Shanichari does not remain a dumb and mute subaltern anymore. Enlightened by Dulan and the pressure to make both the ends meet, she became an evolved individual who knows how to manipulate the same people who had mistreated her. When her wailing partner Bikhni dies, she does not give up, she goes to the red-light area and asks the whores to wail at the death of Gambhir Singh, thereby earning money at the death of their sexual exploiter. She didn't break down at the demise of her associate and decided to remain in her profession all by herself. She continued to survive and grow amid turbulent conditions.



Shanichari becomes a 'savior' who not only establishes her identity as a mourner, but also she tries to change the condition of the village prostitutes, who were exploited by the social giants. She tells them not to surrender to their fate, she rather inspires them to follow her footsteps in sustaining their livelihood by becoming mourners. She teaches them the trade of a professional mourner so that they can survive after being abandoned by their owners.

She even forgives her daughter-in-law for running away and becoming a prostitute after the death of her son Budhua. She asks her to accompany other prostitutes in following her to the house of an upper caste individual named Gambhir Singh, who has died recently. She convinces them to be brave enough in wailing at the death of the dominant section of society who devastated their lives. She says:

You too come bahu. Gulbadan, you come along as well. Gambhir Singh has died; by wailing for him and taking their money, you'll be rubbing salt in their wounds. Don't hold back. Take whatever You can. Five rupees a head, everyone will get rice, and cloth at the kriya ceremony. (Devi 117)

In *Rudali*, Mahasweta Devi depicts the gradual movement of its protagonist from a powerless subaltern to an influencing persona. It offers a critique to the existing social situation which differentiates among individuals on the basis of their economic condition. *Rudali* is a powerful story of a subaltern's move from periphery to the center. From the above analysis of the novella, it can be asserted that it is post-colonial in its nature as offers a sort of resistance to the domination of the upper classes. Her portrayal of a character like Shanichari shows the type of compassion she has for people of the unprivileged sector.

In almost all her works Devi has taken a subaltern as her protagonist. But the fact that makes her different from other writers of this genre is that her lead characters never submit to the existing norms and traditions. They rather challenge them in order to create a new social order. They make constant attempt to raise their position by intimidating the agencies which try to regulate their actions. This sort of confrontation which is highlighted in *Rudali* through the character of Shanichari makes the work post-colonial in its theme and treatment.

Roy's novel also portrays rebel subalterns, but they are not able to challenge the system as Shanichari does. Though they show occasional instances of resistance against the system, yet they fall prey to it. The protagonist Ammu tries to resist by lodging complaint

against the persecutors of her partner, but the Police officer refuses to listen to her and outrages her modesty by indecent gestures. Her pleas fall into deaf ears as the law keepers turn down her pleading. Velutha was later put to death by registering a false case of rape and murder. Estha and Rahel were manipulated by Baby Kochamma to testify that, which finally led to the end of Velutha.

Police personnel's behavior with the subalterns is also under scanner in Roy's novel. The way Inspector Thomas behaves with Ammu at the Police station is alarming. Instead of registering a complaint against the persecutors of her lover, he constantly insulted her and violated her modesty. The voyeuristic treatment contradicts the delineation of POLICE. He insulted his profession by engaging in an act of disrespect to women. On the contrary, it was his duty to protect the dignity of a lady who sought his help.

He tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap, tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out at the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he could not. Policemen have that instinct.

Behind him a red and blue board said:

Politeness

Obedience

Loyalty

Intelligence

Courtesy

Efficiency (8)

Arundhati Roy has dealt with the issues of the subalterns in her non-fiction work also. "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" contains essays which address several issues of importance. Her deep concern for socio-political issues is quite evident in the book. Roy takes up several sensitive matters of worldwide importance and deals with them in this acclaimed work. It will not be an overestimation to say that Roy is a true sympathizer of the subalterns. In "The End

of Imagination”, Roy puts up a brave front by critiquing the then governments’ decision of nuclear test in Pokhran in the year 1998.

She talks elaborately about the devastating effect of nuclear weapons. She upholds the picture of possible health hazards which will be created due to the testing of such weapons. She tells about the outcome of such acts which will only put everything at risk. She also says that in carrying out such wars our enemies will not be China or America, but earth herself. She offers her resistance by saying that:

Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn topoisson. The air will become fire. The wind will become flames. When everything there is to burn has burned and the fire dies, smoke will rise and shut out the sun. The earth will be enveloped in darkness. There will be no day. Only interminable night.(6)

Arundhati Roy, in the essay “The Greater Common Good” highlights a world of exploitation, where the interests of the Adivasis<sup>5</sup> are violently ignored for the prospects of the rich and powerful. The essay begins with a famous quote of Jawaharlal Nehru, where he tells the people who were to be displaced by the Hirakud dam “If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country” (47). People are made to believe that dams are beneficial for the development of the nation. The reference of the usage of big dams occur in the textbooks of elementary classes. Children are forced to believe that dams will be helpful in eradicating poverty from India.

Building of dams were synonymous with nation-building process. But Roy is of the opinion that dams do not do well to anyone. They are only a means of exercising power over the innocent farmers and villagers. This is nothing but a systematized way of accumulating land from the poor people and giving it to the rich. These reservoirs are responsible for the displacement of huge number of people and making them deprived of their original abodes. Moreover, these big dams can lead to ecological imbalance by causing flood and sanitation problems.

They can also be viewed as potential threat to occurrence of natural calamity like earthquakes. Roy then states that big dams are being destroyed in the developed nations as they do not do any good to mankind. They are not democratic and can be considered as a way

of exercising power in matters of power distribution. It is a means of asserting power over the already powerless populace.

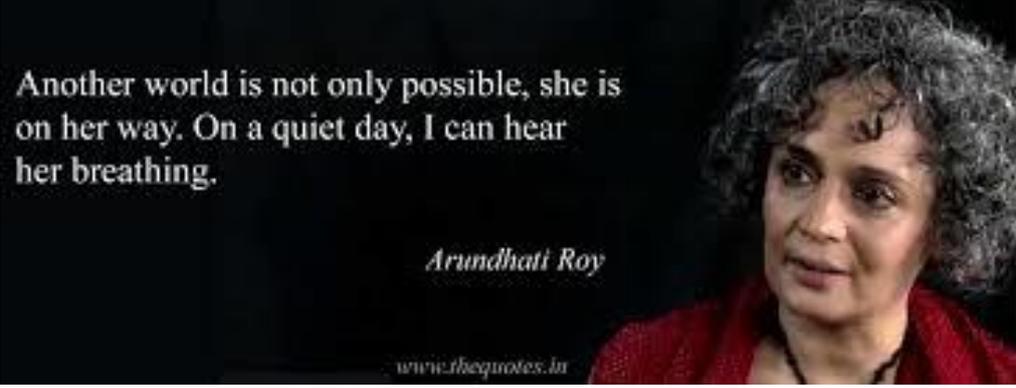
Roy also tells that big dams are not cost efficient. The government had to pay thrice the amount it took from the World Bank as loan in order to construct the dams. She says that “India paid \$1.475 billion more than received.” (77) In the essay, she talks about the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam along the river Narmada, which will displace thousands of natives from the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

There will be a huge loss to the biodiversity if the surrounding areas. Environment activists could understand the threat that will be caused by the rise of water level in the dams which will submerge the natural habitat of wildlife there. Moreover, the government of India does not have any concrete data of the displaced people who have been forced to sacrifice their shelter for the greater good of humanity.

In “Power Politics”, Roy talks about Shri Maheswar Dam along the Narmada river valley. This dam is special for being the first major private hydroelectric power project. Here she critiques the world bodies and big corporate houses who intend to privatize water resources of the world. Here she also writes about the consequences of making water a commodity in Bolivia. It had a disastrous effect on the socio-political life of the country. She critiques the role of private and public agencies in establishment of big dams.

The price of water rose three times and drinking water did not remain affordable to the citizens and people “took to the streets in protest” (153). They agitated by holding a transport strike which deterred the economy and police fired at the protesters killing six people and injuring one hundred and seventy five people. Privatization has been equated with efficient and corruption free state. But it is only a fabrication and nothing else. These private firms actually reap the benefits of earning profit from the states.

In “The Ladies have feeling, so..” Arundhati Roy talks about the freedom of an artist. She gives justification behind her levelling as ‘writer-activist as she takes sides. She says that she has been given this tag as she ‘takes sides’. She further states that she has been bestowed with this title as she has the ability to take stand on a particular issue and it hurts the sentiments of the political parties.



Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

*Arundhati Roy*

[www.thequotes.in](http://www.thequotes.in)

- Arundhati Roy predicting the birth of a new world.

Courtesy: [thequotes.in](http://thequotes.in)

Roy states that there is a doubt regarding the efficacy of writers in presenting an event with clarity and reasoning. She then questions the role of a writer in a country like India which has a large number of issues. She also questions the implication of globalization in a country as diverse like India. She questions the role of globalization in a country where more than million live in villages and is also marred by caste and class divisions. She says:

Is corporate globalizing going to close the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, between the upper castes and the lower caste, between the educated and the literate? Or is it going to give those who already have a centuries-old Head start a friendly helping hand? (200)

So it can be said that Arundhati Roy's non-fictional world has much space for the subalterns. The way she handles the contemporary issues has led her to controversial situation many a

times. But such hindrances have never affected her art and activism. She herself travelled to the Adivasi land near the site of the proposed dam in order to get a first-hand information of the possible implication of such a measure to be adopted by the government. She gives minute details of the problems that will be encountered by the natives because of the construction of the dams.

Mahasweta Devi's short novel, *Mother of 1084* is a landmark work of fiction. It is an offbeat novel by Mahasweta Devi, just like Arundhati Roy's unconventional non-fiction work *Algebra of Infinite Justice*, which covers subaltern issues with a touch of novelty. Here, she does not portray the exploitation of the marginalized communities as in her other novels. Infact, Devi here describes the world of an aristocratic family of Calcutta who have an aura in society and what happens when one of their wards chooses to fight for the cause of the subalterns.

The novel was written in the year 1974 and revolves around the Naxalite movement which gripped West Bengal at that time. The peasant revolutionaries took revenge upon the landlords who exploited them. The name has been derived from a village in West Bengal which has the same name. They follow radical communism and adhere to the path of violence for getting their lands which have been confiscated by the landlords.

It gradually spread to the other underdeveloped states of India like Chattishgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. The movement was started by local CPI-M leader Charu Mazumdar in 1967. They resorted to armed violence to take back their property from the upper class jotedars<sup>6</sup>. It was witnessing peasant uprising and the novel shows the ruthless operation of the authorities against those people who sympathize with them. It also shows a mother's struggle in trying to come to terms with her son's indifference towards his immediate society.

The protagonist Sujata was different from her aristocratic family. She never used the family car to go to her workplace. She worked in a bank and always used tram instead of the family car. She was a social recluse and never interacted with her aristocratic family and friends. After coming from work, she would read a little and spent time with Brati, her son. He was brutally murdered by the state agency because of his adherence to the ideology of radicalism in dealing with the persecutors of lower class.

The story begins with Sujata's recollection of events before Brati's birth and continues up to the moment when she awakens to the news of his death son one morning. It

shows the struggle of a mother, who is a strong person who tries to come to terms to the loss of her son by understanding the ideals which touched the hearts of the Bengali youths of contemporary West Bengal. She goes against the social norms and makes a study of the factors which made him a revolutionary. She visits the home of fellow revolutionaries who fought for the noble cause, in order to comprehend her son's mission in life.

Brati was against the social system which was ruled by upper class selfish individuals, who were hankering after money and power. And those who refused to obey their modes were subjected to inhuman torture. They were given capital punishment by everybody who felt like doing so. It was not necessary that men in uniform had to punish them, anybody could prosecute them regardless of any trial being conducted. They were very inadvertent in their treatment of the revolutionaries, which led to fatal results. It suggests the perverseness of the entire system which crushes the voice that speaks for the subalterns. "And there was only one punishment that awaited the rebels who showed their reluctance to follow the stereotypical order of the day. They had to embrace death due to their involvement in anti-government agendas" (19)

But the revolutionaries wanted to establish a society based on equality. They were against the exploitation of the poor people by the aristocrats. Brati was the son of an aristocratic family of Calcutta, yet he could not tolerate the injustice done by the upper class. He never showed any approximation with the society of nobles, which imposed its sanctions upon the working classes. He was an active member of the students' group which questioned the values of the gentry.

Social hypocrisy has been a recurrent issue in *Mother of 1084*. The dual nature of society has been reflected quite effectively by Devi. She portrays a society which lacks compassion towards the weaker section of society. Devi ironically speaks about the intellectuals of the city of joy who did not bother to address the brutal killings of the youth. She is against the dual standard attitude adopted by the intellectuals in dealing with the matters of violence.

The ruthlessness of the authorities in dealing with the revolutionaries has not been upheld by the artistic class in their works. They have maintained steady silence which is quite shocking to the author. She expresses her amazement over the silence of the creative people in relating atrocities in West Bengal while they have always being vocal about the disturbing issues relating to Bangladesh.

Devi is deeply saddened by the fact that the moral police maintains a steady silence over this sensitive issue. Instead of showing solidarity to the revolutionaries for their involvement in radical ways to bring equality in society, they chose to remain silent. The youths fought with the hierarchal society which exploited the masses. She ironically states that the silence of the intellectuals was correct. She says:

All this surely could not have been smacked of barbarity and of bestiality. If it had then the poets and writers of Calcutta would have spoken of the barbarities on the side of the border along with the other side of the border. Since they did not, since they could ignore the daily orgy of blood that strained Calcutta and concentrate on the brutal ceremony of death beyond the border their vision must have been flawless. (51)

She states that the killers of the martyrs roamed freely without any fear. Nobody restrained their movements in the streets of Calcutta. There was no one to bring them behind bars for their immoral acts. Nobody could challenge those murderers who took away the lives of the rebels mercilessly. Even the lawmakers were also involved in the cleansing of society. They hardly cared about the innocent souls whose only intention was to create a better civilization on the terms of equality.

The discussed works of the two writers cover a wide range of issues pertaining to subalternity. They have described the various aspects relating to the life of subalterns in the Indian context. The writers have shown the conditions of the subalterns of class, caste and gender. Almost every category of subaltern has found place in their works.

Women, children, Dalits etc. have been equally represented in their suffering. Their position as subalterns have been underscored in the novels of Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy. They are very similar in their treatment of the marginalized members of society. Even they have recognized children's position as subalterns and the way they are exploited. They have presented the sorry state of affairs that is prevalent in India.

But sometimes they are shown offering stiff resistance to their proprietors when the physically and emotionally drained Shanichari manages to inspire the league of rudalis to wail like professional mourners at the death of their exploiters. Brati is different from his



class as he does not adhere to the hypocritical rules laid down by his upper class family. He rejects such duality and adopts the path of revolution for which he had to lose his life.

Roy's characters are passive in their approach to freedom. Some show courage but fall prey to the oppressive system. Even her critical essays are strong statements against exploitation. The powerful narratives are manifestations of the struggle of the subalterns to occupy the mainstream.

Subaltern theory, unlike most other theories travelled from East to the West. It has been used by writers of different countries as a mode of presenting perspectives upon the discrimination prevalent in the societal set-up because of diversity. And the two authors have pioneered the act of highlighting the tales of exploitation of the subalterns on the aspects of religion, ethnicity and gender. So, Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy are the best explorers of the experiences of the subalterns.

## Notes

1. Rajesh Kumar, S.V. "Voicing the Subalterns in the Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh." *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*
2. Hindi word used for the English word cobbler.
3. Hindi word for the English word tailor.
4. Hindi word for the English word landlords.
5. Hindi word used for aboriginal dwellers.
6. Hindi word for property owners.

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