It is the women who are ruined by the Malik Mahajans who turn into whores. Nonsense they are a separate caste.

(Rudali 80)

God! I am fortunate to have the purest air and the brightest blood in my body. I have not knelt in prayer for any woman. My mind dear sir is the body of a swan. All these years I have made use of women in a wonderful manner. I didn’t get trapped in a knot at the end of a sari. I am untainted and chaste.

(Woodworm 10)

Mahasweta Devi’s fiction has been widely read and critically theorized as a powerful representational attempt from the point of view of the third world marginalia. Questions of caste/gender/class are raised and rethought in the textual and contextual premises of her radical and
interventionist narrative praxis. The plight of the muted and the silenced, the
cause of the gendered subaltern, women’s empowerment and radical feminist
realism – these are some of the positions attributed to her fiction. In *Rudali*
Devi portrays the low caste woman both as victim and as a potentially
subversive agent in the phallogocentric order of Brahmanical patriarchy.

The de-sentimentalized and detached narrative presents the hopeless
predicament of Sanichari and other low caste women in a North Indian
village ruled by Brahmanic patriarchy in the latter half of the twentieth
century. The nexus of caste, phallocentrism and feudalism in this village
breaks the stereotypes of nationalist conceptions like Gandhian Gram
Swaraj. The occidental autocracy of the village communities was the self-
rule of caste, which in Dr Ambedkar’s words was the “ditch of regionalism
and the den of ignorance and parochialism.” The Tahad village is a typical
representation of such a community:

In Tahad village, ganjus and dushads were in majority.
Sanichari was a ganju by caste. Like other villagers her life too
was lived in desperate poverty. Her mother-in-law used to say
it was because Sanichari was born on inauspicious Saturday
that her destiny was full of suffering [...] to herself she would
say – huh! 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? Somri, Budha, Moongri, Bishri – do any of them have happier lives? (54)

So caste and gender affiliations were the decisive elements of social /human status and identity and were the material reality of the Indian village. As a sample and iconic metonymy of the larger national body, the narrative here explicates this village reality of Brahmanic patriarchy, which at the same time is also the national Indian reality. The socio cultural constructs of caste and gender are thus problematized from the very beginning of the novel. The emphasis here is on the gender innuendo of caste patriarchy.7 Sanichari, a Ganju woman, is a representative of the gendered subaltern, the subject who is both low caste and woman at the same time.

The gendered subaltern’s condition of unimaginable material misery and oppression could only be historicized through representative subjects.8 See the descriptions of the torturous and hellish death of a low caste woman and the hardship of the living dead:

Her mother-in-law died in great pain, of dropsy, lying in her own excrement, crying out, over and over, ‘food, give me food!’ It was pouring that night. Sanichari and her sister-in-law lowered the old woman on to the ground. If the rites weren’t carried out before the night was over they would have to bear the cost of the repentance rites for keeping the corpse in the house overnight. And there wasn’t even a cupful of
grain in the house! So Sanichari was forced to go from neighbour to neighbour in the pouring rain. Dragging the neighbours home with her, and handling all the arrangements for the cremation, she was so busy that there was no time to cry. So what if there wasn’t? the old woman had given her so much trouble that even if Sanichari had tried to cry she wouldn’t have been able to wring out many tears. (55)

The misery and the historic experience of injustice dehumanize the subjects to a state of insensitivity. That is why Sanichari, like the vast majority of women in India is presented as un-emotional, bereft of her intimate emotions, and even of tears. Sanichari is aware that it is the daily struggles under oppression and the everyday realities of injustice and double standards that degrade and dehumanize women:

Their grief must have hardened into stone within them. To herself Sanichari had sighed with relief. Is it possible to feed so many mouths on the meager scrapings they bring home after labouring on the malik’s field? Two dead, just as well. At least their own stomachs would be full. (55)

The narrative adds the dimension of class here.9 But clearly it is in tandem with the larger social and cultural determinants of caste and gender that the class issue is narrativized. And again it should be read in the context of the caste feudalism of the Indian village. The Maliks, Mahajans and Maharajas
of the hamlets are caste lords and are anointed as such by Brahmanic patriarchy. It is thus true that these narrative contexts turn women as the real victims of the forces of caste/class/gender. There have been attempts to reduce this dialogic discourse into one that is driven by economic determinism; such attempts too are neutralized in the reading.\textsuperscript{10}

Descriptions of caste oppression and material violence are present throughout the narrative. The serene and idyllic village landscape is littered with caste curses and other instances of symbolic and metaphoric violence. According to the Vaid (physician) of the village, “the lower castes have no patience, no ability to bear up” (61). Note that the curse is always on the caste and on one’s ancestors and the lineage rather than on individual errors and shortcomings.

Such barbarous treatment from the social superiors and feudal lords along with class oppression and material economic misery become endless, especially for the gendered subaltern at the bottom of the hierarchy: “the lice medicine killed the creatures in Sanichari’s hair. After sleeping comfortably she realized that her sleepless nights had been caused by the lice, not mental anguish. No matter how grief stricken one is, a work worn body is bound to sleep well” (67). Thus the individual as well as the social body are in decay and rot and need a reformist intervention badly.

Even the death of the feudal lord is the occasion for establishing caste honour and supremacy. The upper castes lament not for the dead, but
in fear of losing caste distinctions and privileges: “Hai, Chacha! As long as you were alive, the lower castes never dared raise their heads. For fear of you the sons of dushads and ganjus never dared attend government schools! Now who will take care of all these things?” (68). Their fundamental concern is with keeping the Bahujans away from schools, and the dead man was of use in it and that is why his death is being mourned. The barbaric core of the Hindu caste village is explicated here through these Rajput clans and their caste-centred worldview. They themselves were mere footmen in the army of the king and later acquired social and political power through militarization. Later in the narrative this Neo Kshatriya formation of the Shudra footmen is briefly described. As seen elsewhere in the country, once they achieve this Neo Brahmanic stature they become the ardent and devoted protectors of the Brahmanic order and its caste ethos. Even the burial of the dead becomes a ceremonial occasion for the exhibition of the caste affiliation of the dead person in such a context: “We must perform the ceremonies and burial with pomp and splendour. Dress up the body, place him on a big bed and inform our entire Rajput clan” (68).

The caste patriarchy’s ultimate perversion could be identified in the forced custom of making the low caste women weep over the body of the dead upper caste male. This humiliating and symbolically mutilating assault over the material and emotional domains of the gendered subaltern could be contextualized and read as the historically fetishistic, genocidal and perverted
core of Brahmanic patriarchy. The title *Rudali* refers to the humiliating task of the low caste women who are made to wail over their caste master’s death. This forced misery is called the “Rudali work.”

They (upper castes) need rudalis to wail over the corpse. They have got hold of two whores. In the household of the masters, whores weep for the dead. These two were Bhairab Singh’s whores at one time. Now they are wizened crows. They will be no good. The two of you go, wail, cry, accompany the corpse. You will get money, rice. On the day of the kriya ceremony you will get clothes and food. (70)

Though she was totally against it at the beginning, Sanichari also becomes a Rudali because of material constraints. It is the caste lords who create whores and wailers out of the low caste women. Both the body and the mind of the gendered subaltern is the property of the caste lord who has the sovereign power over the subaltern bodies/minds/spirits. The Rajput Maliks literally forced the tag of “whores” on to the low caste women and constructed a descent of prostitute wailers, and the caste called Rudalis.

Singhs of this world treat their labourers and whores alike - they tread them into the mud [...] what vicious bastards that lot are! The worst is Gambhir Singh. He kept a whore, had a daughter by her. As long as the whore was alive, he kept the child in comfort. When the mother died, he told the girl,
whore’s daughter is a whore - practise your profession and
support yourself […] the girl is now rotting in Tohri, in the
randi bazaar. From a five-rupee whore she’s down to a five-
paisa whore. (70-1)

The Rajput legacy of assuming Kshatriya status and Brahmanical legitimacy
is also circulated among the villagers as subaltern folk tales and secret lore:

The tale Dulan told them was very significant. It explained
how the ruthless Rajputs infiltrated this remote area of tribals,
and from zamindars gradually built themselves up to the
status of jotedars/moneylenders and established themselves as
the masters of the area. The Rajputs were the warriors in the
army of the Raja of Chottanagpur. About two hundred years
ago in protest against the cruelties practiced against them the
Kol tribals revolted. The Raja immediately sent out the army
to put down the uprising. Even after the rebellion was
suppressed the warriors’ aggression was not sated. They
went on a rampage killing innocent tribals and burning down
villages. So Harda and Donka Munda started sharpening
their arrows and a fresh tribal uprising was imminent. Then
the Raja sent his sardars to the sparsely populated Tahad
region. He told them take as much land as is covered by
throwing your swords in the air... that's how they come to be the masters of this region. (73)

Thus the whole history of invasion and aggression is narrativized at different levels with inter-textual references within the text. This again is typical of Mahasweta’s fiction that falls back upon historical and even social anthropological research and archival data. *Breast Stories* is another example in which the gendered subaltern Dopdi is such a fictional representation of a community of others and outcastes marginalized along caste and gender lines. Sanichari in *Rudali* too is an individual representation of such a community that is always outside the texts of culture and history. Almost all of Mahasweta Devi’s female protagonists articulate the larger questions of the community of people who are erased from the discourses of mainstream fiction. The deliberately detached and de-sentimentalized voice dominating the narrative could perhaps be contextualized on this premise. The texts break apart the stereotypes of intimacy, romantic nostalgia and evocative sensuality associated with an appealing narration in order to emphasize the mundane and material inequality implied by caste and gender.

The Brahmanic Hindu system survives on the labour potential of the Bahujans and on the bio power of the gendered subaltern. The company of “whores” is literally produced and maintained for the purposes of hegemony. Thus the wailing whores are not only made but are kept, preserved and rated too according to the commodity price index. “Lachman Singh has ordered
that ten, twenty, and whatever it takes he wants good rudalis. Two hundred rupees have been budgeted for this” (71). Their wailing potential is nurtured and promoted with adequate resources. “And feed them well – they can’t mourn convincingly on an empty stomach” (71).

But the problematic emerges as the narrative fuses class outlook with a caste/gender perspective to focus on the ideological underpinnings of caste patriarchy:

Business prospered. There was such a demand for the pair who wailed at Bhairab Singh’s funeral, that it was almost like a war of prestige. Soon not just the landlords and moneylenders but lalas and sahus began to ask for Sanichari. In fact, when Gokul lala’s father died he said, come everyday till the kriya ceremony, Sanichari. (75)

On certain occasions class seems to overtake caste as forces of caste defilement are suppressed by concerns about class status: “His(lord’s) mother is left to lie in her own excrement all day. Once every evening Moti the dushad woman cleans her up – no one is concerned about loss of caste or defilement any longer, it seems” (77).

The absurdity of this class angle is that it is the low castes who are at the bottom of things even in the class analytical framework; and they are unable to climb up economically on a vertical axis from within this “class system.” This pretentious and ideologically strategic class mode of narration
is self-exposed and cancelled by the dialogic narrative discourse itself on occasions:

When someone died in a malik mahajan household, the amount of money spent on the death ceremonies immediately raised the prestige of the family. The status of the rudalis also rose. The price for this was paid by the dushads, dhobis, ganjus and kols, from the hides of whom the overlords extracted the sums they had overspent. (80)

Such is the degrading conditions in which the low caste woman is destined to live: "It is the women who are ruined by the Malik Mahajans who turn into whores. Nonsense they are a separate caste" (80). But Sanichari rises to the occasion and seizes the opportunity by making it an act of revenge and expression of historical dissent. "Sanichari thought that perhaps her tears had been reserved for the time when she would have to feed herself by selling them" (72). Whenever she gets an opportunity she strikes at the heart of caste patriarchy: "Sanichari puts on an innocent air and asks – But I heard that the upper castes never got smallpox? That it was a disease of the poor and lower castes? That's why we take the government vaccination as well as appease the gods" (78). This kind of a feeble and postponed protest or defensive empowerment could be identified in the central character as the narrative advances.
The gendered subaltern occasionally uses the frameworks and hidden structures of caste patriarchy to derail its own operations from within, though this is done hesitantly. The position of the historical victim and her struggle for self-defense and survival are articulated somewhat ambiguously by the text. That is why even in the concluding scene the rising protest wail of the Rudalis before the master’s corpse becomes an apology for a rebellion and an articulation from within a mediated and confined space already marked and permitted by the Brahmanic patriarchy and never breaks and subverts the system (91).

The detached narrative voice that attempts a de-sentimentalized representation of woman as whore also problematizes the “whore” discourse popularized by patriarchy. Patriarchy stereotypes and labels any subaltern woman as a “whore” but the repeated use of the word throughout the narrative also draws attention to the ideology of this mode of marking and addressing the woman (“You are the daughter of a whore” and “a whole crowd of whores” (81)). In that sense the social effect of the narrative discourse is that of reiteration of the status quo and of maintaining the balanced power relations existing in society.

Such consensual generalizations and compromises with the existing order and the class analytical modes of orthodox Marxist analyses could also be identified as the cause of the strange mix-up of the class factor in certain weak points in the narrative that defeats itself in the overarching effect of
caste and gender cultural contexts. The caste core of the context rushes back with a vengeance as the class mode tries to take over. That is why even after assuming an occupational class status, the Rudalis transform themselves into a caste, that too a gendered caste, specifically a low caste of “whores.” This could again be identified as the central tension or contradiction in the social practice of Mahasweta’s fiction and her narrative praxis. Most of her texts try to tackle and address the tension in caste/class/gender relations in the historic context/s of the Brahmanic caste patriarchy in North and Eastern India and when they fail and cancel their own discourses of counter-hegemonic and subversive politics, they do so in response to the class burden of the middle/upper caste Indian literati. The class hangover of the intervening middle class/caste activist is therefore under question and scrutiny as a reluctance to address the issue of caste and its historical exclusions, its unimaginable barbarism revealed in the very act of its avoidance/suppression in the present. The ambivalence of the activist writer and the ethical dilemmas of the intervention narrativized in the fictional text are problematized in such a reading and the question of agency and voice for the subaltern is foregrounded. This once again throws up the fundamental cultural materialist questions of caste and gender in the historic premises and discursive contexts of the Brahmanic caste patriarchy. It also brings to light fiction’s affiliations with the dominant and hegemonic ideologies and affects and its limitations in radical praxis. This is also the background against
which the politics of disguise and avoidance in the novel *Woodworm* invites critical attention.

When Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay’s *Woodworm* was first published in 1967 in Bengali it was widely read and acknowledged as an existential narrative that depicted the identity crisis and alienation of the protagonist Shyam in an increasingly urban, middle class Calcutta. Critics and commentators were quick to identify the strong and lasting imprint of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* and Camus’ *The Outsider* in it. But when we place the text in its cultural context the story that emerges is much more complex and conflicted.

Shyam Chakrabarty, son of Kamalaksha Chakrabarty, born and brought up in an upper middle class Bengali Brahman family is the protagonist of the novel. He is the deputy chief of a corporate house called Saint and Miller. But he quits his job because his boss calls him “bastard.” He experiences a deep psycho-social crisis that leads him to a life of murder, adultery and endless moral turmoil. The striking elements of his behavior are violence and sexual perversion. His moral corruption is indicated by the way he kills a motorbike rider in the street by reflecting light on to his eyes. He plays with women in an endless abusive game that explains the depth of his psycho-sexual ruin and the split in his psychic personality. As the narrative closes we see him plunge deeper and deeper into an ego-centric game that is an expression of his withdrawal into himself. This withdrawal, needless to
say, assumes new meanings in the context of the critique of the sovereign self related to Brahmanic masculinity made in Chapter I.

An egocentric or oedipal psyche that tries to master and manipulate fellow beings could easily be identified in this psycho-sexual drama. The fascist oedipal subject of the novel kills and subordinates upwardly mobile men and charming women. He controls their life energy, mobility and sexuality. This centered subjectivity craves for total and comprehensive control and agency. At the heart of its seductive core lies the desire for governmentality. Its craving and yearning is for absolute power and totalizing hegemony. This omnipotent and all pervasive hegemonic agency wants to intervene in everything and wants to represent everyone. The subjectivity that represents all and intervenes everywhere like this can be called a fascist subjectivity. It never compromises in matters of control, power, autonomy and governmentality. Actually it evades the slightest challenge to its regime and retreats into the darkness of the underworld like a blood-sucking vampire, as is narrated at the end of the novel. It eludes and escapes all egalitarian resolutions and de-centering democratic formations. Violence, hierarchy, subordination and exploitation are its classic paradigms and potential sources. This fascist subject is nothing but a representative of the hegemonic subject position, which in Indian cultural and historical context could be termed as that of Brahmanic patriarchy.
The crisis and alienation that the subject experiences, following a slight threat to his totalitarian existence (the boss calling him bastard) could be regarded as an iconic threat to the hegemony and totalizing power of representation (in the post-independent constitutional context the power elite had to share political power with the people). He collapses in the face of increasing challenges (people’s collective movements and attacks on power monopolies) to his hegemony. But even in ruins he could not change and continues his parasitism (the vampirism of surviving on the lifeblood and toil of the people) and hides away his countenance in earth as the narrative closes. Thus this bloodsucking and seductive vampire is nothing but a classic metaphor of the hegemonic subject that assumes fierce proportions with inputs from patriarchy and elitist cultural discourses. In analogous situations in the Western context of capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari would call it an “oedipal subject” that tries to master and manipulate everything around it. They have very precisely identified the fascist underpinnings and implications of such a subject. In his preface to Anti Oedipus, Foucault identifies the centrality of desire as it is expressed and repressed in specific cultural contexts and connects it to political fascism as well as to the fascism within us that desires domination of the other and the self.

The cause for Chakrabarty’s quitting the job too is unusual and suspicious: The reason wasn’t terribly serious. Noticing an error in his drawing, his superior Hari Majumbdar had said
‘bastard’ in an aside. Majumdar used obscenities with every breath. Besides, all these days Shyam was emulating Hari Majumdar in his behavior and manner of speech. (1)

So it is implied that it is a matter concerning a ‘Chakrabarty’ and a ‘Majumdar.’ It is a question of surnames and its legacies, a clash of ancient significations and titles, that of Brahmanic caste epithets and of caste hierarchy itself. That is why he “soon realized that a single abusive word had actually released a ghost in his brain” (2).

At this moment it would be significant to remember that the modernist writing in Indian languages often evaded or under-represented key socio cultural questions like that of caste and patriarchy. It was more interested in representing alienation, angst and other borrowed fads. The political question of caste/gender as well as questions pertaining to the hegemonic subject formations are explored in detail in the present rereading. The psychological crisis and schizophrenic drama that unfold in the narrative would acquire a new resonance in such a reading.

First, let us look at the patriarchal psyche of the male protagonist. Soon after he resigns his job Chakrabarty indulges in a sort of woman hunt, going after one woman after another. He is a typical womanizer. He craves to control and manipulate the female subjects; he wants to master their bodies and minds. What he demands is total submission and perpetual subordination and not sex and bodily union. Thus macho perversion and
fascist desire for comprehensive control could be identified in his actions and inactions with a range of women from Brinda, Madhabi, and Leela to Itu.

While Leela has a Brahmanic surname Bhattacharya, Itu has nothing. Itu is a commonplace Bengali name denoting easy availability and access and it is no wonder Chakarbarty uses her as a mere sex slave, a cheap sex toy. He literally plays with her body and spirit: “The game was growing on him. He said cheerfully, ‘play, Itu. Come on, play. You are even more beautiful now’” (22).

On the other hand, he is very cautious and concerned in relation to the Bhattacharya girl. She is everything elevated and refined for him. She is the centre of good taste and refined desire for Chakrabarty (whose surname literally means the emperor). This hierarchized notion of gender and the casteist attitude to sexuality are the chief tenets of Brahmanic patriarchy that not only governs the sexuality of Brahman women in the clan but also expands sexual colonies outside it even among Shudra women. See how Chakrabarty tortures his gendered subjects in classic fascist fashion, reminding us of the nightmares like the ones in Pasolini’s Salo:

Hey... Itu, not there... don’t fall down. You’ll spoil the game. Don’t give up so fast. Don’t stop. If you stop I will boo you. If you stop you are an old crow. If you stop you are a lump of clay. Go round and round Itu... till you turn into a shadow... let me come to you with my desire. (28)
So non-Brahmanical women are mere babbles in his hand, wanton flies which he kills for his sport. The fascist taskmaster enslaves, tortures and eliminates “inferior” women of other races with his omnipotent male desire that consumes everything and targets all. Now see how he handles the male subjects like Minu.

Like Itu, Minu, another common Benglai without a surname, haunts Shyam. Minu is the haunting male figure in his dreams. Minu tortures him and he is presented as a brute force, a representation of the unlimited, uncouth male force that threatens Shyam’s hegemonic aspirations. This image of the violent subversive dark male force that comes from the depth of the underworld or the unconscious recurs in the text as well in the split psyche of the hero and could be placed as the subversive threat that comes from the margins of the social order. An inevitable threat and challenge without a Brahmanic surname from the Bahujan premises.

The challenge that Chakrabarty experiences in his confrontation with the motorbike rider is similar to this. It is a mobile threat from the new “other” world; it destabilizes the hierarchical power equilibrium and displaces the socio political status quo. It is a driving force from the lower strata and is an icon of zooming mobility, which is upwardly and forwardly targeted. The oedipal subject could not stand it and it subverts it at the very first glance. Shyam Chakrabarty as a total zyborg of high-tech Brahmanism has no hesitation whatsoever to exterminate the ‘other’ man in cold blood.
Towards the end of the narrative it is revealed that the victim who dies in a hospital was a poor man with familial responsibilities: “He had remained unconscious till death. He was married two years ago and had a baby daughter” (100). The picture is complete when we connect it to the casual thought of the killer after the incident, yes it is that ancient grudge against mobility that wants to reassert hierarchy and hegemony forever: “He just couldn’t remember the reason why he had an ancient grudge against all motorbike riders” (39).

Chakrabarty is always keen to assert his hierarchical and sexual/gender superiority in relation to people in general and women in particular. He is almost beastly in his desiring gaze: “You are getting worse every day Shyam [...] you have learnt to stare at me like a wolf” (9) says Madhabi. He always imagines himself as the ultimate sexual being, a fatal male centre of desire and refined charms. His own rhetoric goes thus: “in my body resided the purest air and the brightest blood. I have never done any bowing and scraping for woman” (9). So in his ego centric imagination women are always falling for him and he holds the most superior, coveted phallus. This again brings in the analogy of the phallogocentric discourse of Brahmanic patriarchy.

See how he connects this discourse to the formulations suggesting divine and patriarchal rights. For him masculinity is a godly lineage, a patrilineal possession, linked to a discourse that sounds exactly like “the
twice born metaphysics” of Brahmanism narrativized in Samskara (see the next chapter).

‘God! I am fortunate to have the purest air and the brightest blood in my body. I have not knelt in prayer for any woman. My mind dear sir is the body of a swan. All these years I have made use of women in a wonderful manner. I didn’t get trapped in a knot at the end of a sari. I am untainted and chaste.’ (10)

Note the racial supremacist discourse in operation along with the sexist and anti-woman rhetoric. The fascist, hegemonic and oedipal character of Chakrabarty is inscribed and exposed in many of his utterances throughout the text. The oedipal core of his subjectivity is exposed in his queer love-hate relationship to Minu. Minu is a threat and an enchantment for Shyam at the same time. He tortures and enthralls him at the same time in his dreamy memories:

Shyam wished he could go and face Minu now. Slap him on the back and say, ‘how’s everything buddy!’ Then lower his voice and say, ‘take me in your gang mate? These two hands can mange a machine gun or a knuckle-duster; plunge a knife into a stomach as if it is butter [...]’. He wanted to be on equal terms with Minu, sit face to face and speak in an intimate voice. (22)
Another important feature of his mental make up is his deep devotion and passion for Brahmanic texts like the *Gita*. In the context of his hegemonic subjectivity it is not strange that a corporate executive, a booming business magnate like him knows the *Gita* by heart! He is also addicted to the hegemonic hermeneutics of Brahmanic metaphysics contained in such works as *Raja Yoga* and *Life Divine*:

*Raja Yoga* and *Life Divine* were my daily reading. I know the *Bhagavat Gita* by heart [...] I had gone quite far on the path of asceticism [...] whenever I sat in meditation my skin crawled, my body felt light as air, I would even see an occasional glow of light [...] stood with my hand across my chest like Vivekananda [...] in those days when I was twenty-one. (42-3)

The ideological underpinnings of the hegemonic subject is indicated here. It is nothing but the cultural and religious nationalist ideology of Hindu revivalism exemplified in the Vedic and Vedantic hermeneutics of Vivekananda and Aurobindo. Recent scholarship has identified them as the proto texts of cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism that emerged in the wake of anti-colonial Hindu Brahmanic nationalism and the Bengal renaissance. Also note his intense affiliation to the *Gita* (he knows it by heart!) which is the iconic Brahmanic text that preserved Chathurvarnya and the caste system and ensured Brahmanic hegemony for millennia.
Chakrabarty is always keen to establish and signify his Hindu Brahmanic identity as distinct from that of his Muslim fellow beings. Even in a city tram he remembers it: “Suddenly Shyam remembered that Irfan was a Muslim, that he himself was a Hindu... It seemed incredible that he was the son of Kamalaksha Chakrabarty” (66). Even in his perverted and weird encounters with “girls” he repeatedly invokes and sustains his Hindu Brahmanic patriarchal legacy. Before Leela he is all the more charged up: “My name is Shyam Chakrabarty. My father was Kamalaksha Chakrabarty. We belong to the Shandilya group of families. My ancestral home is in Banikhara” (91).

Thus a sense of hierarchical distinction, racial/caste and gender superiority in relation to women and Bahujans, perpetrated with the support of the obscurantist metaphysics of Brahmanism is narrativized through this complex character. The woodworm that permeates and consumes the whole structure from within is therefore a just metaphor for the oedipal, fascist and hegemonic subjectivity of Brahmanic patriarchy. Naturally its victims are Bahujans and women, struggling to break away from the shackles of Brahmanic patriarchy. A democratic and egalitarian de-centering is impossible since even in the closing lines of the narrative this oedipal subject retreats back to its underground, it digs its head into the earth (106) in perpetual avoidance, escaping the material reality and its ethical demands, leaving no scope for socialization.
Notes


3 Uma Chakravarty, “Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28 (1993): 579-85 describes the Brahmanic Hindu world in which an extreme form of social stratification is practiced by which women and low castes are subjected to humiliating conditions of existence. Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of this social order. In this even upper caste women are enslaved to maintain not only patrilineal succession but also caste purity. For the


6 B R Ambedkar, *Complete Works*, vol.2 (Bombay: Govt. of Maharashtra, 1986) 34.


8 Seemanthini Niranjana, *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization and the Female Body* (New Delhi: Sage, 2001) explores the gendering of the social and bodily spaces and sites that serve the purposes of patriarchal hegemony.

See for example Anjum Katyal, “The Metamorphosis of Rudali” in Mahasweta Devi, *Rudali* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1997) 1-53. The chunk of the argument is that the individual is historicized to explicate the context and a subaltern view of economy, polity and society. Suggestions on the sidelining of gender by the class discourse too could be traced here.


