Chapter 2

SUBALTERNITY: AN OVERRIDING CONCEPT

IN

LITERATURE
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2.1 Introduction

Gramsci, the Marxist thinker and theorist of Italy, adopted the term ‘subaltern’ to refer to those groups in the society who are “subject to the activity of the ruling class” (55). The literal meaning of the word ‘subaltern’ as given in the *Oxford Dictionary* is ‘any officer in the British army who is lower in rank than a captain.’ So, the term signified subordination and Gramsci attached a special significance to this military term by incorporating “peasants, workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power” (Ashcroft 215). Gramsci was one of the founders of the Italian Communist party and he had contributed a lot for the upbringing of the lower class people. He was imprisoned several times and most of his philosophic thoughts emulated from his ‘prison writings.’

Gramsci had given a new dimension to the Marxist doctrine by inculcating the method of persuasion to achieve the social goals in the society. Gramsci moved away from the Marxian terminology to refer to the ‘proletariat’ as subalterns. The proletarians and the subalterns are not equal but different in their approach and attitude towards the society. The proletarians are conscious of their class identity and they always rebel against the bourgeoisie for the establishment of a classless society. The subalterns on the other hand are not conscious of their class as they are non-hegemonic in their approach to the society:

The subaltern class, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a “state”: their history therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of states and groups of states (Gramsci 52).
In the post-colonial scenario, the Gramscian term ‘subaltern’ gets wider perspective as it refers to the third world countries and the marginalized groups in the society. Subaltern Studies as a distinctive branch of learning and research began first in England in late 1970s to excavate the history of the marginalized section of the society. In order to get wider acclaim and extensive outlook, the historians from both England and India agreed to launch a new journal in India. In 1982, Oxford University Press in New Delhi brought out the first volume of essays entitled Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, edited by Ranajit Guha. The first three volumes of essays appeared annually from 1982 and the volumes of essays were mounted to six within the next five years.

Ranajit Guha retired as an editor of Subaltern Studies in 1989, after having edited six volumes to his credit. Ranajit Guha had eight collaborators to succeed to his throne and their strenuous effort resulted in bringing out several volumes of Subaltern Studies. David Ludden sums up the achievements of Subaltern Studies in the following words:

In the 1990s Subaltern Studies became a hot topic in the academic circles on several continents; a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies (1).

In the Indian cultural context ‘subalternity’ acquires more significance owing to the colonial past. In the preface to the first volume of Subaltern Studies, Ranajit Guha says:
The aim of the present collection of essays, the first of a series, is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian studies. And thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristics of much research and academic work in this particular area (vii).

Subalternity becomes an overriding concept in literature when the marginalized section of the society has no voice of its own. In India the caste system was so rigid that the lower caste people had not even the freedom to share the public properties like roads, wells and even educational institutions. People were divided on the basis of caste and people who belonged to different castes would have to carry out certain duties assigned to them. The Shudras, the lowest class in the Ancient Hindu society, carried out the filthy jobs and they suffered the greatest humiliations when they were segregated as untouchables from the main stream of the society. Mulk Raj Anand published his first novel Untouchable in 1935 and it was an eye-opener to the rigid observers of untouchability. In the preface to Untouchable, E. M. Forster says:

The Sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to arrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disquieting as well as a disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into
his soul and that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be (8 - 9).

Mahatma Gandhi was an influential figure at the time of India’s struggle against the British forces and he himself appeared as a character in Untouchable to preach against the practice of untouchability. Though the Government of India abolished the practice of untouchability by law, the mentality and outlook of the people remained the same. India is also not free from the class system. The class system was firm footed with the advent of the British rule to India. The availability of cheap labour and rich resources prolonged their stay here in India. The labourers under the British rule had a traumatic experience with minimum wages and maximum work. The labourers were very often cheated by the agents by offering high wages as in the case of Gangu in Mulk Raj Anand’s Two Leaves and a Bud.

In India, subalternity is caste bound whereas in Africa and in the U. S. the same issue is encountered on the basis of race and class. Racial discrimination in its worst form exists in the U. S. and the atrocities against the coloured people are still on the rise. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed by the American President Lincoln in 1863, which brought an end to the slave trade in the U. S. Even after hundred years, the deplorable condition of the coloured people remains the same. Martin Luther King Junior, an eloquent black Baptist Minister, was a true champion of Civil Rights Movement in the U. S. from the mid-1950s until his death by assassination in 1968. In order to annihilate the racial discrimination, Martin Luther King Junior played a crucial role in the South and other parts of the U. S. On 28 August 1963, Martin Luther King organized an interracial assembly at Lincoln
Memorial in Washington to demand equal rights for all. Luther King addressed the interracial assembly by pointing out the shameful condition of the Negroes:

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and find himself an exile in his own land (27).

Racial subalternity is a reality even now in America. In the post modern context the voices against racial segregations get more prominent. Toni Morrison, the Afro-American writer, realized very early in her life that racism had become the greatest enemy of the ‘coloured’ people. Through her writings, she tried to vindicate that getting back the black identity was the only way to check the racial discrimination. Pecola, in The Bluest Eye, desires to have white skin, blond hair and blue eyes against her dark complexion. It is the result of a misconception regarding race in the American society. Racial discrimination grows to such an extent that even the mental make up of the coloured people supports the racial differences and superiority of the white. The Afro-American writers inculcate through their writings that black identity is not inferior to white in any way. Physical appearance and culture may be different but that doesn’t mean servitude of the entire race.

Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things depicts the caste and gender subalternity from a historical perspective. In Kerala, untouchability was observed by the Brahmins in the pre-independent India. The lower caste people were
discriminated on the basis of caste but at the same time the paddy fields were given to them on lease. They were asked to present the major portion of the yield to the landlord. The lower class people didn’t get anything out of the contract as it was fixed on high terms and conditions. In order to escape the scourge of untouchability, the lower class people were readily converted to Christianity. They realized that it was a historic blunder when they were denied all the privileges of reservation by the Government. The newly converted Christians are still ill-treated by the society. The after-effects of conversion and the approach of the society towards the downtrodden are clearly manifested in Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*.

The condition of the women in the society was not much different from that of the untouchables. Though a woman is respected like a goddess, her role is very much limited by the male dominated world. The men-folk will be happy when women carry out the traditional job of rearing children and looking after the house hold duties. Women in the society occupy only a subordinate position and their rights and privileges are determined by the patriarchal society. Marriage decides the fate of a woman and after marriage the woman has no role in her parental home. The institution of marriage has deteriorated to a position of pure business. Women are destined to share the loss and their sacrifices add to the privileges enjoyed by men. Ammu, in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, becomes the victim of gender subalternity, as she is ill-treated by her husband and the family. She married a person of her own choice when all other ways were closed. Ammu’s family took an extra care in giving higher education to her brother Chacko. He was sent to
Oxford for higher studies, on the other hand “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl … since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposal came Ammu’s way” (Roy 38).

In order to regain her freedom, Ammu escapes from her family to spend the summer with her distant aunt who lived in Calcutta. Ammu agreed to the person who proposed her, as she “thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn’t reply (39). Ammu didn’t take much time to realize that she had married the wrong person. “Ammu was repelled by the medicinal smell of stale alcohol … his bouts of violence began to include the children” (42). Ammu was left with no choice, except to return to Ayemenem. “To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams” (42). Arundhati Roy’s vivid portrayal of the subalterns in The God of Small Things is a retreat into the past events. Arundhati Roy’s fictional and non-fictional writings address the needs of the subalterns. She becomes the post-colonial voice of the marginalized and the oppressed sections of the society. The subaltern themes of gender and caste have been revitalized in her novel The God of Small Things with an exuberance of fictional reality.

2.2 Mulk Raj Anand: An Advocate of the Downtrodden

Mulk Raj Anand belonged to the literal spectrum of the ‘Big Three’ of the Indo-Anglican fiction. Mulk Raj Anand wielded his pen against the class and caste systems of our country during the pink decade of 1930s. He was the Grand Old Man of Indo-Anglican fiction, born on 12 December 1905 in Peshawar, the capital
city of North West Frontier Province of India before the country’s partition. In 1925, Mulk Raj Anand graduated from the Punjab University with Honours in English. He received a scholarship to do research in London just after his graduation. The London University awarded Doctoral degree to Mulk Raj Anand in 1929.

Mulk Raj Anand became an advocate of the subalterns when the country needed moral help and support to eradicate untouchability and superstition. He rose to the occasion with his debut novel *Untouchable* in 1935. It was hailed as a minor classic and he could establish his name as an immortal crusader against the evil practice of untouchability. Mulk Raj Anand’s portrayal of Bakha, the central character in the novel *Untouchable*, created ripples in the minds of the people. Naik says:

> It is highly significant that Anand’s very first novel, *Untouchable*, is a triumphant assertion of his humanitarianism. To choose an untouchable as hero in the year 1935 was, in a sense, a revolutionary gesture in Indian fiction in general (35).

Mulk Raj Anand was the true champion of the underdogs. He was the first person to realize in the literary circle the victimization of the subalterns in the society. Mulk Raj Anand’s novels vindicate the injustice and the inequality that are rampant in the society. The greatest contribution of Mulk Raj Anand to the Indian fiction is his realism which has paved way for social change. *Untouchable* gives a vivid picture of the caste system that exists in our country.
India is known for its rich culture and heritage but the social evil of untouchability has destroyed the unity among the people. Mulk Raj Anand’s novels *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* concentrate on the class system in our country. Mulk Raj Anand, the celebrated Indo-Anglican novelist, has earned universal recognition through his novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie*. The caste and class systems were responsible in dividing the people of our country. As George says:

An important aspect of Anand’s fiction is its concern with the reality of organized evil. In all his novels he appears as a social critic. The society he has seen and observed is the field of his work. His writings probe deeply into the social process. For him literature is an expression of society and the large majority of the questions raised by him are social questions: questions of tradition and convention, norms and genres, symbols and myth (5 - 6).

Mulk Raj Anand had clear visions behind the creations of all his novels. His aim was to correct the evil ways of the society. He was conscious of the fact that the illiterate masses were being exploited by the upper class in the name of caste and creed. His sympathy was always with the underdogs and contributed his might to raise their standard of living. The wretched condition of the oppressed section of the community has been vividly described in *Untouchable*. Almost all his heroes are powerless to fight against the social order as they are overpowered by the organized evils in the society. Mulk Raj Anand was a humanist and a true proletarian to uphold the doctrine of ‘Art for the Life’s Sake’. The didactic elements predominated in his writings as he had a game plan to teach the humanity the fundamental principles of life. He states that “writing novels for the sake of writing
novels was, as you know, never my intention. I felt compelled to answer challenges
and try to get out of my own confusion” (George 25).

Mulk Raj Anand emerged himself as a leading advocate to voice the pent-up
emotions of the subalterns during the 1930s. Empathy with the suppressed class
stands out to be the major theme of Mulk Raj Anand’s writings. He has the credit of
portraying his characters as they are and not as they ought to be. Through his
writings, Mulk Raj Anand projects the social evils which have harmful effects in
making the common man’s life more and more miserable. He couldn’t compromise
with any kind of injustice against the subalterns in the society. He emphasized
individual freedom as a source of autonomous power. The individual freedom is
denied to the subalterns by the upper class by way of creating class and caste
discriminations. His creative writings effected a positive change in the society for a
better tomorrow:

Casteism is a hydra-headed evil contagious like small pox. It is a heinous
crime. It poisons and destroys the dignity of man. Hence it must be rejected.
Anand is right in beginning his career as a novelist by presenting the evils of
caste system (George 19).

Mulk Raj Anand was an impartial judge of humanity and he advocated love and
fraternity to achieve success in the society. The characters represented in his novels
were not mere imaginary persons but they were closely connected to the personal
life of Mulk Raj Anand. In the Preface to the second edition of Two Leaves and a
Bud, Anand says:
All these heroes as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels … were dear to me because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writing. They weren’t mere phantoms…They were the flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way, in which certain human beings obsess an artist’s soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he sees to interpret the truth from the realities of his life (6).

Mulk Raj Anand dedicated his whole life for the upliftment of the downtrodden. He was an ardent spokesperson of the subalterns. Anand’s humanitarian outlook placed him in the hearts of millions of countrymen as the protector of the subalterns. Anand has envisaged the ideal world for the subalterns, as he says:

I hope for a world in which the obvious primary degradation of poverty has been completely removed. So that man can have enough food, clothing and shelter to grow up as strong and healthy human beings, physically and mentally and pro-create a fine race to people the universe, in the place of those stunted, subnormal, miserable millions, tortured by starvation, disease, unemployment and war, who have been the background of my life. I want this for all men and women, irrespective of race, colour or creed, with special provisions for planned health and housing facilities for the backward and extraspecial provisions for the care of the very old and the very young (Prasad 6).
2.2.1 Caste and Segregation in Untouchable

Mulk Raj Anand comes to the forefront of Indo-Anglican literature as a crusader against all types of injustices to subalterns. In the Indian cultural context, subalternity occurs in the name of caste, class and gender. The caste system had played a great havoc to the people of our country. Even under the British rule, the situation was not different. The caste system is deep-rooted in our country from the time immemorial. Untouchability is the by-product of caste system. There were four main classes in Ancient Hindu Society - the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishayas and the Sudras. The Brahmins represented the highest class in the society as they were the people almost near to God. The Kshatriyas were warriors and thus the defenders of the country. In the caste hierarchy the Vaishayas occupied a position lower to the Kshatriyas. They were interested in money as they were the producers of wealth. The Sudras were the labourers who carried out menial jobs of sweeping and cleaning. The sweepers and scavengers were regarded as untouchables as they carried out the filthy jobs. As the sweepers and scavengers had to remove the human dung with their hands, it was thought that a touch by a sweeper or a scavenger would have the effect of polluting a caste Hindu. To eradicate this social evil, early efforts were begun with Swami Vivekananda who wrote:

The caste system is opposed to the religion of Vedanta. Caste is a social custom and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste and every time it has only riveted the chains (31).
Caste system slowly began to decline in India with the entry of Mahatma Gandhi in the political arena. Gandhi realized that the people of India should be freed not only from the British rule but also from the clutches of caste system. Gandhi had made strenuous efforts to travel all over the country to spread the message of love and brotherhood. He had appealed to the people of our country not to indulge in inhuman activities of caste system. In 1932, Mulk Raj Anand met Gandhiji at the Sabarmati Ashram and stayed there for three months. Mulk Raj Anand revised several parts of his novel Untouchable at the advice of Mahatma Gandhi before it got published in 1935. He was pleased to follow the advice of Gandhi, who instructed him, “One must not write anything which was not based on one’s experience” (George 11). Mulk Raj Anand’s first novel Untouchable proved to be a minor classic with a preface by E. M. Forster. Untouchable attacked the caste system that was prevalent in India at that time. Due to this social evil, the country was divided and there was no unity among people for national integration. Untouchable was a protest novel and Mulk Raj Anand’s method of attacking the social evil of caste system invited the attention of the people. Anand states the purpose behind the creation of Untouchable as:

Untouchable was in its sources a ballad born of the freedom I had tried to win for truth against the age-old lies of the Hindus by which they upheld discrimination. The profound thoughts of the upper orders in ancient India about caste were often noble. Someone in the great Mahabharata had cried, “Caste, caste - There is no caste!” And I wanted to repeat this truth to the “dead souls” from the compassion of my self explanation in the various Hindu
hells, in the hope that I would, myself come clean after I had been through sewer, as it were (George 19).

*Untouchable* deals with the experiences of an eighteen year old sweeper boy called Bakha. He is regarded as an untouchable by the caste Hindus. He is in charge of keeping the public latrines clean and tidy. Bakha, the central character of the novel *Untouchable*, was actually the playmate of Mulk Raj Anand, when he was a small boy. As an young boy, Mulk Raj Anand used to mingle with children of different castes. One day as they were playing, a dhobi boy called Ram Charan threw a stone which happened to hit Mulk Raj Anand and he fell down. The children were afraid to touch Mulk Raj Anand as he belonged to the highest caste and they would be committing the sin of ‘pollution’. It was Bakha, the sweeper boy, who had the courage to carry the injured friend to his mother. Mulk Raj Anand’s mother got angry with Bakha as if he were responsible for it. This particular incident had made an indelible mark in the mind of Mulk Raj Anand. He realized that the generous nature of ‘Bakhas’ in our society was being wasted on the basis of caste. He had vowed to fight against the caste system as he was conscious of its cruel nature. In *Untouchable*, Bakha and his sister Sohini are being segregated from the main stream of life on the basis of caste. People from the higher caste believed that it was the responsibility of Bakha to keep the public latrines clean and tidy. At the same time, they disliked the presence of Bakha near the latrines. “Men came one after another, towards the latrines. Most of them were Hindus, naked, except for the loin-cloth, brass jugs in hand and with the sacred thread twisted round their left ears” (Anand, *Untouchable* 20). The outcastes were not allowed to
draw water from the public wells and they were severely punished if they go against the rule. They have to wait near the well for some Hindu to come and pour water into their pitchers:

Their hands in servile humility to every passer-by; cursing their fate, and bemoaning their lot, if they were refused the help they wanted; praying, beseeching and blessing, if some generous soul condescended to listen to them, or to help them (Anand, Untouchable 27).

The subaltern segregation in its heinous form occurs in the case of Bakha in Untouchable. One day after having earned eighteen annas, Bakha wished for buying sweets to cherish one of his unfulfilled dreams. The confectioner threw the packet of jilebis, like a cricket ball, so as to avoid ‘pollution by touch.’ When Bakha placed the nickel coins on a shoe-board, the confectioner’s assistant sprinkled holy water to remove the pollution. In order to forget the humiliation, Bakha began to munch the jilebis as he walked. To his greatest disappointment, he heard:

Keep to the side of the road, ohe low-caste vermin!...Why don’t you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning (Anand, Untouchable 52 - 53).

To add insult to injury, Bakha was slapped by the Lalla for committing the sin of pollution. Bakha was encircled by a great crowd which demanded him to apologize publicly for what he had done. Bakha’s earnest desire to eat the sweets
had gone in vain when the jilebis fell down from his hand and scattered all over the ground. Bakha was insulted publicly and he couldn’t forgive two things: first of all the slap by the Lalla who “ran away, like a dog with the tail between his legs” (Anand, Untouchable 58) and the people who were responsible for scattering the jilebis.

In the ‘Temple incident’ of the novel Untouchable, Bakha and his sister Sohini were being severely accused of polluting the temple. Bakha was curious to know what had actually happened as he was not involved in any of the crime. The serene and holy atmosphere was disturbed by the sudden cry, “Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!” (68). Bakha had been asked to get rid of the place by the congregation, in one voice:

Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, dog! ...

A temple can be polluted according to the Holy Books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine (69 - 70).

Bakha and Sohini became mere scapegoats of Pandit Kalinath’s misbehaviour in the temple courtyard. Pandit Kalinath, the high priest of the temple, tried to molest Sohini but she resisted the temptation. Pandit Kalinath’s exploitative nature lurked inside as he was attracted towards the untouchable girl Sohini. In the public, Pandit Kalinath condemns the untouchable but in the dark this same person behaves in a different way as in the case of Sohini. As she says, “that man made
suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I screamed, he came out shouting that he had been defiled” (70). Pandit Kalinath could mislead the worshippers in the temple with mere words ‘Polluted!’ The high priest of the temple dared to shout in front of the temple so as to save himself from troubles. Pandit Kalinath pointed an accused finger at Sohini when his attempt to seduce her went in vain. As George says:

The great Pandit’s misbehaviour with Sohini and his shameless accusation that she made physical contact with him and defiled him is a typical illustration of the general hypocritical behaviour of the white-washed guardians of religion. It also shows that lust knows no untouchability. Pandit Kalinath’s lustful behaviour with Sohini is only human frailty whereas his accusation that she polluted him with her touch is beyond doubt diabolic. Pandits like Kalinath are pilots leading the Indian society to a sure crash. Anand’s exposure of them is intended only to avert it (41).

Mulk Raj Anand as social critic conveys a strong message through his novel *Untouchable*. Its purpose was didactic and targeted to fight against caste segregation in the Indian society. The caste system affected the Shudras in the worst form as they were the lowest class in the Ancient Hindu society. Mahatma Gandhi had begun the early steps to eradicate untouchability from the Indian society. He dedicated most of his time and energy to stop this evil practice and Anand’s *Untouchable* was indeed a realistic work to rectify the mistaken notions of the biased Indians. Mahatma Gandhi appears as a character at the end of the novel.
Untouchable. Bakha was relieved from the scourge of untouchability when he listened to Mahatma Gandhi:

I was at Nellore on the National Day I met the Untouchables there and I prayed as I have done today. I do want to attain spiritual deliverance. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition. Therefore, I prayed that, if I should be born again, I should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, but as an outcaste, as an untouchable (164).

Mahatma Gandhi’s speech was an open appeal to put an end to the evil practice of untouchability. Gandhiji regarded untouchability as “the greatest blot on Hinduism” (163). His earnest desire to eradicate untouchability finally gave rise to the Anti-untouchability Act of 1955. In Untouchable, Mahatma Gandhi takes the role of a saviour to pacify the sober hearts of the untouchables. As he says:

I am an orthodox Hindu and I know that Hindus are not sinful by nature … they are sunk in ignorance. All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums, must be declared open to the Untouchables. And, if all of you profess to love, give me a direct proof of your love by carrying on propaganda against the observance of untouchability - Do this, but let there be no compulsion or brute force in securing this end. Peaceful persuasion is the only means. Two of the straight desires that keep me in the flesh are the emancipation of the Untouchables and the protection of the cow. When these
two desires are fulfilled there is Swaraj, and therein lies my soul’s deliverance. May God give you strength to work out your soul’s salvation to the end (166).

The novel Untouchable ends on an optimistic note when Bakha returns home to tell his father about what Gandhi and Iqbal Nath Sarashar have revealed in public. Bakha seems to be more happy with the proposal put forward by Iqbal Nath Sarashar, the young poet. The advent of machine to clear dung will free the untouchables from caste subalternity. “The sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society” (173). In 1961, Mulk Raj Anand wrote The Road based on the same theme of untouchability. He realized the necessity of writing on the same theme as he was provoked by a real incident in his life. George quotes Mulk Raj Anand as:

Well, it was a kind of shock to me when I went to live in Haryana, 20 miles from Delhi in the human empire of Jawaharlal Nehru, to find that the outcastes not only in the South India, but in the mixed North were still confined to the limbo of oblivion. There was something tragic-comic to me in the fact that the caste Hindus would not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables to make the road, because the stones had been touched by the untouchables. I mentioned this to the great Nehru. He did not believe me. He was quite angry at my mentioning this awkward fact. I said I would prove it to him by showing it to him in the enchanted mirror (44 - 45).
Untouchable and The Road are the two sides of the same coin as they deal with the same theme of untouchability. Mulk Raj Anand realized the need of concentrating on the same theme even after twenty-five years since the publication of the first novel Untouchable as the social realities were not different from the pre-independent India. The caste system is an artificial invention by the privileged class to exploit the poor. Social disparity is a necessary criterion to avail cheap labour. Cast system is a great curse that India has faced throughout the century and it is a great hindrance to the national welfare and human solidarity. Untouchable occupies the position of a holy book among the subalterns. Its message is wide and clear as Gandhiji says at the end of the novel. If the Hindu oppress the untouchables, then “they should understand that the fact does not lie in the Hindu religion, but in those who profess it” (165).

2.2.2 Exploitation and Tyranny in Two Leaves and a Bud

Mulk Raj Anand’s Two Leaves and a Bud vividly portrays the class system that existed in the pre-independent India. Two Leaves and a Bud became a controversial novel when it was published in 1937. The British characters in the novel represented the western thoughts over the Indians who were servile to them in every deed. The Britishers came to India for trade and commerce and they established their colonies throughout the country. The hidden agenda behind the establishment of the colonies was to drain the wealth from the country. Exploitation in its highest form began with the British rule in India and they tried to worsen the class system:

If caste system is cruel enough to create untouchables among human beings, class system is no less cruel to humanity as it makes the rich, richer and the
poor, poorer. It turns the poorest one in society a mere ‘brother to an ox.’ It segregates and enslaves thousands of people into endless misery and eventual extirpation. Class system is a greater evil than caste system. This is obvious from the fact that the rich low-caste is better placed in society than the poor high-caste. The caste victims can at least draw sympathy and support from members of their own caste whereas the class victims have no such consolation and have to suffer perpetual deprivation (George 51).

Mulk Raj Anand’s heroes are physically weak and mentally tough. Gangu, the hero of Two Leaves and a Bud, was exploited by the British managers of the tea estate in Assam when India was part of British Empire. Gangu was a hard working peasant and one day he lost his only source of income when his brothers mortgaged the family’s farm to repay their debts. It was at this crucial moment, Buta, the agent, lured Gangu to work as a coolie in the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. Gangu along with his children and wife reached the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam and to their great disappointment the new place didn’t give them any ray of hope. Gangu found it difficult to meet both ends meet with only half a rupee a day as wages. The unhygienic surroundings stifled Gangu and his family and they had to accommodate themselves in a dark and dungy room. Gangu was ill-treated not only by the British managers but also by the Indian subordinates. The pathetic plight of Gangu echoed through a series of questions raised by him:

Did all the sahibs who came to own this land get their labourers by letting lies pass for truth, did they make deceit a virtue and exalt the worst to the worst, make every pushful duffer like Buta into a sardar, and liberate all the
selfishness that any charlatan could use for his own purpose? Do all good men
die here, and others live on? (65).

The traumatic experience of Gangu was not at all different from that of other
workers in the Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam. Croft-Cook and Reggie Hunt were
the exploiters of the Indian coolies along with the Indian sardars. Narain was
brought by the planter’s agent to work at Macpherson Tea Estate in Assam for three
years on contract basis but he was not allowed to leave even after twelve years. He
has a sad story to reveal:

This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbearable jail. The
chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you
should go … The chowkidars go round at night with a lamp and open every
door to see it we are all at home. There used to be a roll call every night before
I came (38).

The coolies were denied the basic access to pure drinking water and the polluted
atmosphere was handy for various types of diseases. The British doctor John de la
Havre was conscious of the wrongs done to the Indian coolies by his superiors and
he presented the pathetic situation before Croft-Cook. The hard-hearted manager,
Croft-Cook, turned a deaf ear to his plea and showed his imperialistic attitude
towards the Indian coolies. The British managers of the tea estate in Assam led a
life of leisure and luxury at the expense of the Indian coolies. The British doctor
John de la Havre questions the relentless attitude of the authorities in the following
words:
Why didn’t occur to any one – the simple, obvious thing that people don’t need to read Marx to realize here? The black coolies clear the forest, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money – grabbing, slave-driving, soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies (123).

Gangu found his life miserable in the Macpherson Tea Estate as he could earn eight annas per week. He realized how he had been cheated by the agent’s false promises such as high wages and free gifts of land. Gangu became a victim of malaria and he insisted “I shouldn’t die” as he was the bread earner of his family. He implored the help of God to extend his life “till Leila is married and Buddhu has grown up” (83). Gangu’s wife Sajani died of cholera and he had no money for her cremation. He had to beg in front of Croft-Cook and Buta for some money but they were not ready to help Gangu. Gangu borrowed twenty rupees from a trader at a high rate of interest for performing the last rites of his wife. In order to clear the debts, Gangu requested the medical officer of the tea garden, John de la Havre to recommend for him to Croft-Cook for a strip of land for part-time cultivation. At last he got a strip of land and he was happy to cultivate rice. The happiness of Gangu couldn’t last long when the torrential rain washed away the tender crops and Gangu became helpless all the more.

Reggie Hunt, the assistant planter of the tea garden, had a sexual inclination towards the lowly women coolies of the estate. In order to get some favours from Reggie Hunt, the coolies offer their wives and daughters for his pleasure. When Gangu came to the Macpherson Tea Estate, Narain informed him about the cruel
hobbies of Reggie Hunt. “He has no consideration for anyone’s mother or sister. He is openly living with three coolie women! ... Nobody’s mother or sister is safe in this place” (42). Reggie Hunt was fascinated to Gangu’s daughter Leila. He commanded Leila to pay a visit to his bungalow. But she refused and escaped to her hut. He followed her to her house and gave one rupee to her brother Buddhu to persuade her to come to the house. But Buddhu cried out and rushed towards Narain’s house to inform his father about the terrible incident. Reggie Hunt tried to escape from the place and was being opposed by Gangu. Frustrated and frightened by the situation, Reggie Hunt fired indiscriminately resulting in the death of Gangu. The pathetic death of Gangu was followed by a trial which lasted only for three days. In the trial, Mr. Justice Mowberley and a jury of seven Europeans and two Indians declared a verdict in favour of Reggie Hunt. He was found ‘not guilty’ by a majority of vote and thus the accused was set free. The novel Two Leaves and a Bud presents a tug-of-war between rich and poor, and between the exploiter and the exploited. The exploitation of the poor takes place in a capitalistic environment where the rights of the subalterns are under threat. Among the exploiters, Reggie Hunt, the assistant manager of the tea plantation, makes the lives of Indian coolies miserable. As Paul says:

He is the cause of most of the afflictions of the coolies. He is the energetic youth galloping along all day long. His inexplicable glow of the physical health is in proportion to his diabolic wickedness. He lives for the sake of fun and frolic and had an insatiable passion for destruction (136).
The only optimistic element in *Two Leaves and a Bud* is the behaviour of the medical officer of the tea garden John de la Havre. He is the only non-Indian to help the Indian coolies at the time of atrocities. It was through the sheer determination of John de la Havre that a strip of land was being granted to Gangu. When Gangu requests John de la Havre to recommend for him to Burra Sahib, for a strip of land, the doctor says, “yes, I will do that… certainly you ought to get land... I will see that the contract is enforced” (133).

The non-Indian characters are thoroughly criticised by another non-Indian character John de la Havre for the exploitation of the Indian coolies and for not keeping the promises. John de la Havre feels pity for the Indian coolies and he considers them as “prisoners of so many chains, bearing the physical signs of grief, of lassitude, even after death” (37). The medical officer John de la Havre was dismissed by Croft-Cook for raising an army of coolies in protest against the exploitation. Exploitation and tyranny go hand in hand where domination and class system prevail.

2.3 *Toni Morrison: The Mouthpiece of the ‘Coloured’*

The coloured people were transmigrated from Africa to America and they were forced to forsake their own culture and identity. They were being devoured by an alien culture which couldn’t incorporate the original values of the Black. The Black people were reluctant to accept the alien culture but at the same time they were caught between two worlds: the one which already banished them and the other which was not ready to accept them. It is still a difficult thing for the Americans to be friendly with the Africans. The so-called white race of America does not
consider the Blacks as pure human beings. They consider them as mere ‘creatures’ or ‘second rate people’, good only for physical labour and hard work. The white superiority couldn’t reconcile with the Black race as they differ in physical appearance.

Traditionally white complexion is associated with superior race and black complexion with inferior race. The colour symbolism has created a great havoc in America and they are still not free from this artificial evil. The colour ‘black’ stands for iniquitous and malignant ways of life. The ‘white’ colour is symbolic of virtue and goodness. This mistaken notion can be traced back to the ancient writings where God is being described as ‘white’ in complexion and devil as ‘black’ in complexion. So, for a white person the black people appear to be mere devils. The condition of the blacks in America is worse than that of the untouchables in India. Though slavery is abolished in America, the Blacks are still ill-treated and subordinated to the white superiority. The blacks in Africa and America were being identified as Negroes. Now they are referred to as the people of the coloured, a neutral term that discards the social stigma. The coloured people are still segregated on the basis of racism and social interaction is denied to them.

Toni Morrison, the Afro-American writer has become the mouth-piece of the coloured people. Toni Morrison’s writings are tales of the coloured people’s oppression in a white dominant patriarchal society. Toni Morrison grew up amidst the relentless battle against racial oppression and class struggle. Her grand parents had moved North from the South to escape the scourge of racial discrimination. Despite the struggle, Toni Morrison got educated in an environment steeped in
black culture. Her family encouraged her to be proud of her origin as a black girl. In Howard University, she changed her name from Chole Anthony Wofford to Toni Morrison because people found the pronunciation of Chole difficult. Toni Morrison was the first Afro-American writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Toni Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* is a moving portrayal of a black woman’s quest for ideal self. The novel is about a young girl, Pocola Breedlove, who becomes mad by her earnest desire to have white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes:

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time (35).

The black people have to undergo a lot of oppressions and atrocities in the name of racial inferiority. Toni Morrison’s second novel, *Sula*, depicts the female bond between two black women, Sula and Nel. The novel focuses its attention on sexual constraints on black women and the problems of good and evil. An enchanted friendship grew up between Nel and Sula, “daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers” (52). Both Nel and Sula realised very early in their life that “they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them” (52). Nel, the conventional woman got married to Jude Greene. Sula on the other hand transcends the conventional attitude and when she was asked to get married and have babies, she replied, “I don’t want to make somebody
else. I want to make myself” (92). Sula’s attempt to escape the racial realities reflects her earnest quest for freedom.

Toni Morrison occupies a major position within the black female writers. *Song of Solomon* was published in 1977 and it became the best seller and won the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction in 1978. *Song of Solomon*, Morrison’s first novel with a male hero focuses its attention on seeking and denying one’s cultural roots. In 1980, Toni Morrison was appointed to the National Council on the Arts by President Carter and in 1981 she was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. *Beloved, Jazz* and *Paradise* constitute a trilogy, each recording black women’s search for a sense of self. In 1988, Toni Morrison was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved*. It examines the system of slavery that existed in America. It is dedicated to the sixty million and more Africans who died in the Middle Passage in the slave ship to America. In this novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison focuses on the issue of slavery and infanticide. Toni Morrison is credited for her mysterious blending of historical facts and fantasy in *Beloved* under the pretext that slave mothers sometimes kill their children to save them from all kinds of human suffering. Sethe, the protagonist of the novel kills her daughter Beloved by severing her head with a hand-saw. As Sethe says, “If I hadn’t killed her she would have died” (79). When the spirit of Beloved appears before her mother as a young woman to claim her love, Sethe convinces her, “What she had done was right because it came from true love” (309).

*Beloved* depicts the dehumanisation of slaves in America with special reference to racism. Sethe, the protagonist of *Beloved* mourns by saying that “those white
things have taken all I had or dreamed and broke my heart strings too” (109). Sethe was treated as a goat by Schoolteacher’s nephew and her swollen breasts were milked by two grown men. Sethe was regarded as “property that reproduced itself without cost” (228). The blacks were not allowed to fulfil the basic needs of enjoying sex and loving their children. “Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings … but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them” (209).

The question of identity and cultural escape form the major themes of Toni Morrison’s novel *Tar Baby*. The Negro identity has suffered oppressions throughout history as they can be easily identified with their black skins. They carry the burden of racial oppression and the scars of slave heritage. *Tar Baby* vividly portrays the class struggle against capitalism. Jadine, the art historian, is caught between two cultures and she tries to escape from her Negro identity to accept the Western ways of life. She is trapped in the internally colonised world of white man.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison analyses the issue of “racism in terms of its consequences on the victim” (11). Toni Morrison is of the opinion that the “origin and fabrication of racism itself, contesting the assumption that it is an inevitable, permanent, and eternal part of all social landscapes” (11). The Afro-American writings witnessed a shift in the late 1970s, as they incorporated the necessity of black culture. Toni Morrison in her world of fiction portrays the black people with their inner thirsts and aspirations. The black people carry on their young shoulders the burden of being subjugated in all spheres of life. The concept of white superiority dominated their minds and they
became powerless to be self-assertive. As they were suppressed in the main stream of life, they could never gain the consciousness to dominate the other. Toni Morrison has now become the ‘mouth-piece’ of the coloured people. She has inculcated human values to the people of the ‘coloured’ by asserting their worthiness and virtues. The time has now come for the people of the ‘coloured’ to uphold their watchword: ‘Black is beautiful.’ The Black Arts Movement was supported by Le Roi Jones, John Oliver Killens and Larry Neal. They were instrumental in proposing ‘Black Aesthetic’ for the wholestic development of Black literature and culture. In order to escape the scourge of racism and class struggle, the black people consciously or unconsciously tried to accept the whims and fancies of the white people. They were convinced of the fact that once they entered into the magic world of white superiority, they would be able to forget the scars imprinted by the society. This futile attempt is seen in the life of Pocola in *The Bluest Eye* and that of Son and Jadine in *Tar Baby*.

### 2.3.1 Victims of Racial Subalternity in *The Bluest Eye*

Racial discrimination exists without any boundaries and the concept of ‘race’ is being determined on the basis of colour and power. Race is a term given for the “classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distant groups” (Ashcroft 198). A regular slave trade began as early in the Seventeenth Century and the ancestors of Afro-Americans were brought from Africa to work in the plantation. The Afro-Americans got the slave identity under the white masters. Eventhough slavery was abolished legally through the strenuous efforts of eminent leaders, the Afro-Americans were never considered equal to the whites. The Black
people are trying to identify themselves with the white, their culture and ways of life. Toni Morrison, through her writings, insists on Black cultural heritage and solicits the Afro-Americans to be proud of their Black identity.

Toni Morrison’s writings emulate with a historical sense, giving importance to their origin and cultural heritage. Her works foretell the predicament of Afro-American women in white racist America. The deliberate thrusting of white culture seems to be the most dangerous thing upon the Afro-Americans. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove becomes the victim of racial subalternity when she wishes to have blue eyes as one of her cherished dreams. Pecola is obsessed with white complexion and she hopes against hope to remove the secret of her ugliness:

Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk. The first letter of her last name forced her to sit in the front of the room always. But what about Marie Appolonaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino. Her teachers had always had treated her this way. They tried never to glance at her, and called on her only when every one was required to respond (34).

In order to gain acceptance and recognition in the white society, Pecola implores the help of God. She knows that her physical appearance is ugly. At the same time she wildly wishes for a pair of blue eyes:
If those eyes of hers were different, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good and at least her nose was not big and that like some of those who were thought so cute (34).

Pecola wants to look like Shirley Temple and she is “fond of the Shirley Temple Cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face” (16). Pecola has idealised Shirley Temple as the paragon of beauty. Pecola was under the false conviction that her eyes would become blue if she ate the candy with the picture of Mary Jane on the wrapper. Pecola could console herself by eating her favourite candy for a positive result and the deep-rooted concept of white beauty haunted her like anything:

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blonde hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (38).

Pecola is the victim of social, cultural and familial conflicts. She fails to identify with her race and tries to accept the alien culture that becomes unattainable beyond recognition. The futile attempt of Pecola to achieve the blue eyes is one of her ways to avoid the racial subalternity. Claudia, the ten year old narrator in The Bluest Eye, condemns the American standards of beauty as one of “the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion” (95).
The blacks became the victims of racial subalternity when they failed to create their own values independent of white supremacy. The coloured people are getting all the more segregated from the main stream of life as they are made to believe that blackness is synonymous with ugliness. There is a confrontation between the actual and ideal self and in the fight for recognition, the coloured people forsake the actual self and project the ideal one. In the process of actualisation of the ideal self, the coloured people subordinate their racial identity to the dominant values. The choice for the ‘other’ develops self-hatred, leading to self negation and race bunking. As Taylor says:

The politics of recognition is based on the insight that our identity is partially shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or groups of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves (25).

Pecola was abandoned by her mother Pauline from the very day of her birth. Pauline had too many expectations about her new born child. To her chagrin, her new born baby appeared just the opposite of her fantasy. “Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knewed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (97-98). Pauline hated the child like anything because she was ugly and devoid of any beauty. Pauline’s romantic notion of physical beauty was shattered after her marriage with Cholly. She couldn’t spend time and money for beautifying herself when she was married to a drunkard:
Money became the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes, his for drink. The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and make-up. She wanted other women to cast favorable glances her way (92).

Pauline attached undue importance to physical beauty as if it were the gateway to freedom and love. She became depressed all the more when she lost her front teeth. The white standards of beauty envisaged by Pauline derived solely from her keen interest in movies. She derived pleasure from watching films and she would like to identify herself with the characters. As Pauline says:

The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I’d go early, before the show started. They’d cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I’d move right on in them pictures. White men taking good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Then pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard (95 - 96).

Claudia, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye*, posits a sharp contrast to Pecola, as she refuses to adore Shirley Temple, the paragon of beauty. Pecola used to spend “a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face” (12-13). Claudia registers her protest as she says, “I couldn’t join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley… what I felt at that time was unsullied hatred” (13). Claudia finds hardly any interest in white dolls, whereas children of her own age are so fond of them:
Claudia was interested to dismember it. To see what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me... I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls (14-15).

The destruction of the white doll is a complex reaction by an young girl against the accepted standards of white supremacy. The small step initiated by Claudia would definitely attain its goal in the long run. Claudia dismantles the doll into various parts, so as to depict the horror of romantic beauty. Claudia lives in the world of realities and she “had no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood” (13).

The Breedlove family was tortured by the scars of racism. They believed that they were ugly (28). The colour symbolism has shattered their prospect of life. They were convinced of the fact that “some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question” (28). In the Breedlove family, each one behaves like a stranger to each other. “Pecola, like Sammy and Cholly, always called her mother Mrs Breedlove” (32). Pecola lives in a family atmosphere which is on the verge of destruction. Pauline always quarrels with her husband Cholly because he is not like the white
men who appear on the movie, “taking such good care of they women” (95). Pecola’s brother Sammy tried to “run away from home no less than twenty-seven times” by the time he was fourteen (32).

As an introduction to the novel The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison extracts the Dick-Jane Primer. The primer is repeated twice, one without punctuation and on the second time without space between words. The primer pictures ideal home which is in sharp contrast to Breedlove family. The downfall of Breedlove family is intensified when the chapter titles of the novel refer back to the primer. Morrison describes the intention of using the primer as:

In The Bluest Eye I used the primer story, with its picture of a happy family, as a frame acknowledging the outer civilisation. The primer with white children was the way life was presented to the black people. As the novel proceeded I wanted that primer version broken up and confused, which explains the typographical running together of the words (Morrison, Conversations 127).

The father figure presented in the primer takes care of his children well whereas Cholly plays a destructive role to break the chord of unity in the Breedlove family. Cholly was abandoned at birth by his mother and he was brought up by his Aunt Jimmy. The unforgettable event happened in his life when he was making love to a country girl named Darlene. Cholly was forced to perform sex with Darlene in the presence of two white men. “Go on” they said. “Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good” (31). The sadistic pleasure derived by the two white men resulted in
the utter transformation of Cholly. He didn’t cultivate any kind of hatred towards the white men, instead he:

Hated, despised, the girl. Even a half remembrance of this episode, along with myriad other humiliations, defeats, andemasculations, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised himself - but only himself (31 - 32).

The humiliating experience had far-reaching impact in the life of Cholly. Cholly’s rape of his daughter Pecola is an external manifestation of his inner struggle and hatred. The bitter experiences of Cholly’s past life blinded even the blood relationship. Cholly, the victim of racial subalternity, impregnates his daughter Pecola. Cholly physically violates Pecola and commits the mortal sin which is beyond redemption:

Pecola Breedlove is the tragic character in the novel. She is victimised by both parents because they are made incapable of nurturing her by the limiting phenomenon of race, sex and class. Out of a deep well of self-hatred and psychic pain, they give Pecola the fullest measure of their misery. Pauline loves Pecola, but she beats her… Cholly loves Pecola, but he rapes her (Gayles 139).

The tragic life of Pecola is further burdened when she consults Soaphead Church to fulfil her life-long dream of having blue eyes. Soaphead Church has declared that he is “a true Spiritualist and psychic Reader, born with power” and he assures “satisfaction in one visit” (137). He was really trapped by Pecola’s earnest desire to have her eyes blue in colour. Soaphead Church was surprised by the
demand of “an ugly little girl asking for beauty… This seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfilment” (138). Soaphead Church tried to corrupt Pecola and violate her spirit when he asked her to give the poisoned food to the dog. He convinces Pecola by saying that “If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one” (139). The dog ate the poisoned food given by Pecola and it died but nothing happened to Pecola. Soaphead Church wanted to get rid of the dog owned by Bertha Reese. It was a nuisance to Soaphead Church and so he victimised Pecola to carry out the task. He literally made Pecola a scapegoat for his own individual gain. He was responsible for the mental derailment of Pecola with her guilt consciousness of having killed a dog. The Breedlove family was completely shattered by the romantic ideas of love and beauty. They were tempted to cross the forbidden territory and they couldn’t resist the temptation. The Breedlove family becomes an utter fiasco in combating the evils of racism. Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* teaches the Afro-Americans to be proud of their rich cultural heritage and never run after the temporary things of life.

2.3.2 Class Struggle and Cultural Escape in *Tar Baby*

Toni Morrison’s fourth novel, *Tar Baby*, was published in 1981. It focussed on the theme of class struggle and the cultural escape of the subalterns. The novel is set on a Caribbean island, Isle des Chevaliers, owned by Valerian Street. The deliberate attempt of Toni Morrison to shift the setting of the novel outside the boarders of the United States reveals her own pent-up emotions of the African people. A relationship develops between Jadine, the European-educated African-American woman, and Son, a Florida-born African. Valerian Street, a white man, is an
embodiment of American capitalism and imperialism. He has risen in power and fortunes by exploiting the labour of the African people and later he has ventured to conquer their land for his personal welfare. Valerian Street could flourish in the candy making business that allowed him to occupy the entire Caribbean island. Valerian Street’s inhuman attitude towards his subordinates is vivid when he insults all those who are present at the Christmas dinner. Jadine who belongs to the oppressed class joins hands with her oppressor Valerian Street. At the Christmas dinner, Jadine “poured vine, offered him a helping of this, a dab of that and smiled when she did not have to” (205). Son belongs to the oppressed class and he is wounded by the approach of Valerian as:

Son’s mouth went dry as he watched Valerian chewing a piece of ham, his head-of-a-coin profile content, approving even the flavour in his mouth although he had been able to dismiss with a flutter of his fingers the people whose sugar and coca had allowed him to grow old in regal comfort… he turned it into candy… and sold it to other children and made a fortune and built a palace with more of their labour and then hired them to do more of the work he was not capable of and pay them again according to some scale of value that would outrage Satan himself (203 - 204).

The most ironic thing happens when Valerian Street fires Gideon and Therese, the original inhabitants of the island, just for stealing a couple of apples:

Valerian Street dismissed them with a flutter of the fingers, because they were thieves, and nobody knew thieves and thievery better than he did and he probably thought he was a law-abiding man, they all did, and they all always
did because they had not the dignity of wild animals who did not eat where they defecated but they could defecate over a whole people and come there to live and defecate some more by tearing up the land and that is why they loved property so, because they had killed it soiled it defecated on it and they loved more than anything the places where they shit (204).

Valerian is named after a plant and his name suggests a small plant with strong-smelling clusters of pink or white flowers. Its roots have got a medicinal value, often used as sedative. Drummond Mbališa tries to defend Morrison’s accurate use of the term ‘Valerian’, as she says:

Valerian is asleep throughout most of his adult life, unconscious of or unconcerned by the exploitive manner in which he has accumulated his wealth, ignorant of the physical or psychological abuse of his child by his own wife, unsympathetic to the feelings of his servants and most important for Morrison and her audience, insensitive to the plight of African people (92).

In *Tar Baby*, Valerian ill-treats the butler/maid couple – Sydney and Ondine Childes – to a certain extent that they try to retaliate with harsh words. Ondine shouts at Valerian Street, “I may be a cook, Mr. Street, but I’m a person too” (208). Valerian believes that wealth and ownership can change the world and he derives pleasure by exercising power over his subordinates. Valerian Street doesn’t take any interest in learning the names of the islanders who work for him day and night. He calls the washerwoman ‘Mary’ though her name is Maria Therese Foucault.
Jadine is conscious of her class but she tries to escape from the fret and fever of her own culture. She is an Europeanised African who wishes to belong to the white upper class. She has an earnest desire to be known herself as a white woman. So, she tries to imitate the white upper class mannerisms. Jadine takes all possible ways to identify herself with the whites and she also shares her ideology with that of her oppressors. Jadine is obsessed with white culture just like Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* who prays every day for blue eyes. Jadine’s embracement of the alien culture causes crisis in her own identity as she neglects the African culture. She is lost between two worlds - one that is not good to accept and the other totally unattainable due to her dark complexion. The butler/maid couple – Sydney and Ondine Childes – and their orphan child Jadine take pleasure in serving the Street’s family. The black servants in Street’s house owe their allegiance to their master’s culture and forget their own culture and heritage. In the process of actualisation, Jadine wipes out her culture by not being identified as black woman; instead she projects the white values. She curses her own culture as she internalises the white values and thoughts. Jadine questions Son, the dark skinned fugitive on the run for murdering his wife, when he intrudes into the Street’s house. Although Jadine has a subaltern identity in this context, she joins hands with the Street’s family as if she owned the house. As Jadine says, “It depends on what you want from us” (118). Son is surprised by the close affinity of Jadine towards the Street’s family when he says, “Us? You call yourself ‘us’?” In *Tar Baby*, Son, the revolutionary protagonist, condemns the African people who do not struggle against capitalism. The people of the African origin are conscious of the fact that capitalism is their primary enemy, yet people like Jadine adore and worship it. Toni Morrison’s *Tar
Baby is an in-depth study of two divergent cultures represented by Jadine and Son. Jadine is hailed as a European woman through her close attachment to the white ideology. Son stands on the opposite pole and epitomises the black culture. The African people are the victims of white supremacy and they are exploited to the maximum for their welfare. Son, the representative of the exploited, “saw the things he imagined to be his, including his own reflection, mocked. Appropriated into decor. He could not give the last thing left to him - fraternity” (169).

The revolutionary protagonist, Son, is corrupted by the capitalistic lifestyle represented by his lover Jadine. He succumbed to her pressure and Son gradually imitates the mannerisms of the ruling class to please Jadine. In order to secure Jadine, Son is forced to give up his own philosophy of life and he becomes the instrument of Western ideology. Jadine through her earnest perseverance and proper channelization could change the total outlook of Son. His conversion from an African to a European begins first with the change of dress habits:

In a white shirt unbuttoned at the cuffs and throat, and with a gentle home made haircut, he was gorgeous. He had preserved his moustache but the kinky beard was gone along with the chain-gang hair (156-157).

The transformation of Son is complete, as he forgets his native place Eloé and its people. Son becomes a prey in the hands of Jadine and commits ‘class suicide’ to bid goodbye to his culture and people:

He had it straight before : the Pie ladies and the six-string banjo and then he was seduced, corrupted by cloisonne and raw silk the colour of honey and he
was willing to change, to love the cloisonne, to abandon the pie ladies and the nickel nickelodeon and Eloë itself (301).

Jadine’s temporary stay at Eloë became a stifling experience as she couldn’t mingle with the illiterate people of that locality. She was indifferent to the poor people of Eloë and pretended to be a European tourist. There was no love lost between Jadine and the people of Eloë and she was relieved when she reached New York. “This is home, she thought with an orphan delight; not Paris, not Baltimore, not Philadelphia. This is home” (223). When Jadine comes back to New York with her haunting memories of Eloë, the heightened class consciousness is revealed, as she says, “If ever there was a black woman’s town, New York was it” (223).

Jadine is overwhelmed by the capitalistic lifestyle that she even forgets the relationships. She is always on the run for personal welfare and material benefits. Jadine escapes from the hard realities of life in order to embrace the former lifestyle in Paris. Jadine hopes to get united with the white man who proposed her and thus become the embodiment of white culture. Jadine’s deliberate attempt to bunk the culture and heritage of her class results in cultural suicide of the subalterns. Jadine the Europeanized African is the tar baby of the novel and Son merely becomes the rabbit snared by the tar baby. Son’s attempt to bring Jadine back to his culture becomes an utter failure; instead Son has been forced to accept her petty bourgeois culture. Son who was critical of Jadine’s capitalistic life styles and mannerisms in the beginning followed her blindly to get her love and concern. Jadine commits the sin of cultural exile as she derelicts Son and goes back to Paris. Son also commits the same mistake by forgetting his people and returns to the Isle
des Chevaliers on the prospect of being one with Jadine. Son’s cultural exile resulted in an utter fiasco as he couldn’t unite with Jadine. The novel *Tar Baby* has an enigmatic closure as Son disappears into the rain forest to join hands with the horsemen of the island for an eternal wandering of the forest like the mythic rabbit thrown back into the briar patch.

2.4 **Arundhati Roy: The Post-colonial Voice of the Oppressed**

Arundhati Roy established herself as a post-colonial writer with the publication of *The God of Small Things* in 1997. She, like other post-colonial writers, tries to throw light on the cultural colonialism that prevails even after the colonial period. After a long period of imperialism, Britishers left India but the cultural imperialism still exists. The minds of the Indian people are colonised in a most dangerous way and the decolonisation of minds is one of the aims of the post-colonial writers:

The first step for colonised people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonising power will have devalued the nation’s past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void (Barry 192).

Roy points out the blind admiration in the minds of the Indian people towards the coloniser. Most of the Indians acknowledge the notion of the superiority of the British culture and language. The mind of Baby Kochamma, the ex-nun in *The God of Small Things*, is colonised to an extreme level. She gives undue importance to learning English language:
Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins’ private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them write lines - ‘impositions’ she called them - *I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English.* A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them out with her red pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments (36).

Over devotion to the coloniser’s culture is the one ‘symptom’ of the post-colonialism. In India, even today, a large number of people place the English language in a high pedestal and vernacular language and culture get only a second rate consideration. As Roy says:

*The Foreign Returnees, in wash’n’ wear suits and rainbow sunglasses… With love and a lick of shame that their families who had come to meet them were so… gawkish. Look at the way they dressed! Surely they had more suitable airport wear! Why did Malayalicees have such awful teeth? And the airport itself! More like a local bus depot! The birdshit on the building! Oh the spitstains on the Kangeroos! Oho! Going to the dogs India is* (140).

Arundhati Roy makes fun of Baby Kochamma’s colonised mind which can stand only the smell of Irish-Jesuit. When Chacko along with his family goes to the airport to welcome Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma tries to impress her ‘ex-sister-in-law’ like an apprentice tries to impress his boss by exhibiting her knowledge in Shakespeare. Baby Kochamma greets them:
Hello Margaret,’ and ‘Hello, Sophie Mol.’ She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-sprite. Of Ariel. ‘D’ you know who Ariel was?’ Baby Kochamma asked Sophie Mol. ‘Ariel in The Tempest?’ Sophie Mol said she didn’t … All this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma. To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class (144).

Comrade Pillai projects himself as a true communist and stands against the capitalistic culture and domineering classes. He shows his earnest desire to identify himself with the coloniser’s ‘royal’ class when he tries “to kick-start” Shakespeare to help his son. “Lenin Mon, tell comrade uncle the one Pappa taught you. Friends Romans countrymen” (274). When Lenin Mon shouted the speech of Mark Antony, Comrade Pillai smiled proudly.

In post-colonialism there would be a conquering of the culture of the colonial country by that of the coloniser. There may not be any external pressure from the part of the coloniser to accept their culture. But instead the people in the earlier colonies try to accept the coloniser’s culture. Their colonised minds set the standards and those standards will be in favour of the superiority of the coloniser’s culture. Ammu and her family go to watch the film ‘The Sound of Music’ three times. The people in the colonies can attach only good qualities with the coloniser and they develop a kind of admiration for the coloniser’s way of life and manners. Pappachi who has all the devotion to English people can’t believe that “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42). He, like Chacko, tries to imitate English people even in the dress code. “Until the day he
died, even in the stifling Ayemenem heat, every single day, Pappachi wore a well-pressed three piece suite and his gold pocket watch” (49). Chacko uses the word “Anglophile”³ to refer to Pappachi and he is aware that he belongs to a family of anglophiles (52). Even then he is not ready to accept the native culture and practices. Though he expresses some idea which shows that he is a detached character who can resist the colonisation of mind, he cannot escape from that fully. His mind has been colonised even before he thinks of it. He keeps British universities on a high level and India’s education system somewhere down.

Colonisation enters even into the minds of younger generation. The children, Estha and Rahel, are familiar with many English works for instance, *Jungle Book, A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Tempest*. Estha wants to sing songs from ‘The Sound of Music’, when he is in the Abhilash talkies. Estha makes Captain Von Trapp in ‘The Sound of Music’ the role model. He realises that he is far away from his role model and when he realises that he puts his head in his lap with much grief.

The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man looks astonished at the boy who sings English songs and talks about pocket money. He expresses his respect towards the family which has some British connections when Ammu reveals the arrival of Sophie Mol from London. “Their cousin is coming tomorrow ... added casually, ‘From London.’ ‘From London?’ A new respect gleamed in Uncle’s eyes. For a family with London connections” (110). When Rahel comes back from America, Comrade Pillai expresses the same admiration. He introduces Rahel to his son:
‘Punnyan Kunju’s son? Benaan John Ipe? Who used to be in Delhi?’ Comrade Pillai said … ‘His daughter’s daughter is this. In America now… In America now, isn’t it.’ It wasn’t a question. It was sheer admiration (129).

There is a hierarchy of superiority in a post-colonial set up. Almost everybody accepts this hierarchy in which top position is always reserved for the coloniser. The second position will be given to someone who is closer to the coloniser. The closeness can be achieved through different ways. Chacko gets a special respect because of two things - one is, he has a white ‘ex-wife’ and the other is, he studied in Oxford. Chacko automatically becomes inferior in front of Margaret Kochamma even though she is a ‘shopkeeper’s daughter’ and Chacko is a Rhodes scholar.

A post-colonial writer has a mind which is also not free from the colonisation. He is a true representative of the people living in a country which once was a colony. A post-colonial writer has

. . . double identity as both coloniser and colonised, and it is the recognition of such double identities which is one of the strengths of the postcolonialist view.

Thus, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, publishing his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958, was criticized by an early reviewer for affecting to identify with African villagers when actually his university education and his broadcasting job in the capital city of Lagos should make him identify, it was implied, with the values of ‘civilisation’, supposedly brought to Africa by Europeans” (Barry 194).
In a similar manner, Arundhati Roy is also exposed to a hybrid culture just like any other Indian who lives in the post-colonial India. Her masterly use of English language shows the influence of the coloniser’s language on the writer. But this influence can be interpreted in a different way that the coloniser’s language can itself be used to materialise the decolonisation of the minds of the people in the earlier colonies. In *The Tempest*, Caliban, the representative of the colonised, uses his coloniser’s language against colonisation or at least to curse him. Though Arundhati Roy is also the owner of a colonised mind, she develops “a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (181-182). One of the worst results of post-colonialism is its influence on the upper classes in the colonial countries. The upper class people in the earlier colonial countries place themselves in the position of the coloniser and develop a ‘big brotherly’ attitude towards the lower classes and the weaker sections of the society. Women, untouchables and Dalits belong to the category of the ‘Other’ and they are cut off from the main stream of life. Arundhati Roy, in her novel *The God of Small Things*, becomes the post-colonial voice of the oppressed to speak out the various atrocities encountered by women and the dalits.

2.4.1 The Double Standard of the Society towards Women in *The God of Small Things*

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is a spectacular work of fiction and it highlights the gender and class discriminations in the society. In the fight for survival, women are always marginalized and discriminated as if they were people without identity. The patriarchal society doesn’t treat women equal to men. It’s men
who always get the upper hand in the society. This double standard of the society towards the weaker section forms the major theme of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Marder says:

The son of my house may be granted freedom to develop his mind, he may have a room of his own, but the daughter is expected to be at every one’s beck and call… for domestic life cultivates the irrational side of a woman’s nature; it is distinguished by the primacy of feeling as science is distinguished by the primacy of intellect. The domestic arts involve mainly the fine discrimination of feelings and the ability to bring about adjustments in personal relations” (34 - 35).

Ammu, the central character in *The God of Small Things*, becomes unwanted in her own home after her love marriage fails with a Bengali man. Ammu went against the wishes of her family in marrying the assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. She knew that Pappachi won’t give dowry to her daughter in getting married to a financially sound man. Ammu was in a hurry to get married to the Bengali man, even without the consent of her family:

Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that *anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn’t reply (39).

Ammu didn’t take much time to realize that her husband was not a suitable match for her. Ammu’s husband proved to be a regular alcoholic and he even asked...
her to sacrifice her honour to please the sexual inclinations of his boss Mr. Hollick. Ammu had to leave her husband when he humiliated her by trying to offer her to someone. Ammu had no other option except to come back to her home with her two children. When Ammu comes back to Ayemenem she realises that women have no right to family property after their marriage, especially in the Christian denomination. In the Ayemenem house, Chacko asserts his position by stating that the house belongs only to him. Chacko once again makes the idea clear by informing Ammu, “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (57).

Ammu was not given higher education by Pappachi while Chacko, her brother, had been sent to Oxford for higher studies. Ammu lives in a patriarchal society where the right to live is under threat for women. The views of the patriarchal society are reflected in the words of Baby Kochamma:

Subscribed whole heartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter … she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an inter community love marriage - Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject (45 - 46).

Ammu’s relationship with Velutha, an untouchable man, was condemned by Ammu’s family. The Syrian Christian family of Ammu didn’t first of all like her marriage with the Bengali man and the circumstances leading to the divorce. According to the patriarchal rules existed in the society, the married woman shouldn’t come back to stay in her father’s house even if she had traumatic
experience with her husband. The married women are treated like goods in the
society; once sold, they will not be taken back. The illicit relationship between
Ammu and Velutha was disclosed by Velutha’s own father to Mammachi. Vellya
Pappen couldn’t conceal the secret, as he was “torn between royalty and love”
(255). Mammachi couldn’t control her rage and she bursts out:

How could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed? They have a particular
smell, these paravans… Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited.
Like a dog with a bitch on heat (257 - 258).

Ammu’s relationship with Velutha was termed as illicit, unnatural and sinful.
Whereas Ammu’s family encouraged Chacko to flirt with the poor women of the
factory to satisfy his “Men’s Needs” (295). Ammu and Chacko are the two sides of
the same coin but the treatment that they get is totally different. Chacko, just like
Ammu neglected the laws of his family by marrying the person of his choice. Soon
after their marriage, Chacko becomes a divorcee and he is also forced to come back
to Ayemenem just like his sister Ammu. But when Chacko returned to Ayemenem,
he was given a ceremonial welcome by the family. He was allowed to become the
master of the family and took the complete charge of the pickle factory. Chacko had
the habit of flirting with the poor women of the pickle factory to satisfy his ‘man’s
needs.’ When Baby Kochamma questioned Mammachi about Chacko’s
opportunistic behaviour, the latter replied, “He can’t help having a Man’s Needs”
(168). Mammachi not only turned a blind eye to her son’s misbehaviour but also
helped him to satisfy his man’s needs:
Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his ‘Needs’ wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents. Or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars. The arrangements suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee clarified things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings (169).

The double standard of the society towards women is revealed through Ammu’s family. Chacko and Ammu commit the same mistake but the punishment for Ammu is severe and relentless. Ammu loved a paravan and this unorthodox relationship initiated troubles for Ammu and Velutha. It was Mammachi who retaliated first against Ammu for the forbidden relationship with an untouchable. She was worried about the society and the bad name that would be attached to her family for generations to come. In a patriarchal society, women’s choices have no values and they are bound to accept the general stream of life. Chacko commits a mortal sin by exploiting the poor women of the factory and he is readily pardoned by Mammachi. On the other hand a venial sin committed by her daughter Ammu was treated with a lot of contempt:

Her tolerance of ‘Men’s Needs’ as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding (The Little Blessed one, blessed personally by the Patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, for ever now, people
would point of them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They’d nudge and whisper. It was all finished now (258).

The caste system is rigid in our country and disapproves of all kinds of inter-caste relationships. Here again the rules are different for the Laltain and Mombatti and the case of a Mombatti woman is even more pathetic. Ammu became a mere worker in Chacko’s pickle factory and she was not even given the respect of an employee. Chacko assumes the position of a male chauvinist in the family to subjugate all the rights of Ammu and her children. The fear of sharing the family property always provoked Chacko to assert his position in the family:

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter had no claim to the property (57).

Ammu and her children became a nuisance to Chacko’s freedom and he was not ready to entertain them in anyway. When Ammu accused Chacko for not looking after her children well, he said “Are they my responsibility?” He further added, “Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck” (85). Ammu was all alone in her fight against patriarchy. The male dominated society has devoured her feelings and a sense of alienation has kept her away from everything:

As she grew older, Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone
Big. She did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact, it could be argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them (181 - 182).

Ammu registers her protest against the male chauvinistic society by committing suicide in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey. Her death proclaims that Ammu is not suitable to live in this world or the male dominated world doesn’t allow her to live. Ammu was thirty-one at her death. “Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age” (161). The church refused to bury Ammu as she defiled the church norms by marrying the person of her own choice and her subsequent suicide. The church was relentless to show any kind of respect to her dead body as they weighed norms more than human feelings and emotions:

Ammu had been humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother. Each of them voiced the patriarchal ideology which commanded that she should have no right anywhere - as daughter, wife, sister and citizen. She was no individual to her society but just an object, a role necessarily submissive (Ray 54).

2.4.2 Marginalization of the Dalits in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things

The Christians in Kerala observed untouchability just like the Hindus. The parayas and pulayas joined the Anglican Church to escape the “scourge of untouchability” (Roy 74). In The God of Small Things, Velutha is the representative
of the untouchable. He is black in complexion but his name in Malayalam suggests that he is white in his appearance. The term ‘Dalit’ literally means oppressed section of the society but now the term has attained a wider significance as it refers to the people who are discriminated on the basis of caste and creed. In the past, unclean occupations were carried out by the untouchables and their presence was considered as a bad omen. It was out of shame that the untouchables were converted to Christianity. The church and the Christian missionaries played a crucial role in exploiting the pathetic condition of the untouchables. They were made to believe that once they become Christians, the caste-stigma would be rubbed off. Initially the dalit Christians received a little money and food as an added incentive. But the newly converted Christians were trapped under the new circumstances as they were not given the equal status. The direct entry of the untouchables into Christianity caused divisions among them and they lost all their benefits of being underprivileged:

They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Parish Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all (Roy 74).
The Dalit Christians were torn between two worlds - one rejected by them and the other not ready to accept them. Mammachi recalls to her memory the rigid caste system that existed in her times:

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 Paravan’s footprint… Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed (73 - 74).

Velutha’s father was a toddy tapper. Vellya Paapen lost his left eye while chipping a piece of granite. It was Mammachi who paid for the left glass eye of Vellya Paapen. Velutha and his father Vellya Paapen were permitted to Ayemenem house but they were given the instruction to follow the stipulated path. Pappachi was dead against the Paravans in the Ayemenem house. In order to deliver the coconuts they had plucked, Vellya Paapen and his son Velutha used the back entrance of the Ayemenem house. “Pappachi would not allow Paravans in the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians” (73).

Mammachi recognizes Velutha’s extra-ordinary ability in making thin gs with his hands. Velutha was a trained carpenter, who invited people’s attention by making intricate toys. Velutha displayed his distinct ability in repairing machines in
Paradise Pickles and Preserves. Mammachi often commended, “If only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer” (75).

In order to utilize the ability of Velutha for the welfare of the factory, Mammachi hires him as the carpenter and keeps him in-charge of general maintenance. Velutha’s presence as a carpenter in the factory was disliked by the touchable factory workers, despite his natural ability. The resentment was so strong that the other workers in the factory refused to work with Velutha. The touchable workers in the factory were of the opinion that “Paravans were not meant to be carpenters. And certainly, prodigal Paravans were not meant to be re-hired” (77). To appease the workers in the factory “Mammachi paid less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan” (77). Mammachi discriminates Velutha from other workers in the factory as he belongs to the lower caste. The subalterns are always on the verge of humiliation and contempt as they are not properly recognized by the society. Velutha was dismissed from the factory for having loved Ammu. It was Vellya Paapen who first saw the illicit relationship between Velutha and Ammu. He couldn’t hide the secret as he saw “What his Untouchable son had touched. More than touched. Entered. Loved” (78). Velutha, the God of small things in the novel, was punished by the police for an unknown reason. He was accused of murdering Sophie Mol and molesting Ammu. Velutha was disowned by the political party to which he owed his allegiance. When Mammachi heard about the illicit relationship between Ammu and Velutha, she summoned him to Ayemenem house:
When Velutha arrived, Mammachi lost her bearings and spewed her blind venom, her crass, insufferable insults, at a panel in the sliding-folding door until Baby Kochamma tactfully swiveled her around and aimed her rage in the right direction, at Velutha standing very still in the gloom (283 - 284).

Sophie Mol’s death was a pure accident. She was drowned at the Meenachal river when she was taken for a cruise by Velutha. Velutha became the scapegoat of Sophie Mol’s death. He was arrested by the police for having killed Sophie Mol. It was a false story created by Baby Kochamma to keep the family’s reputation intact. Baby Kochamma convinced the police that Velutha had tried to molest Ammu and that the reputation of women in the Ayemenem family was under threat. She dramatized the events as:

The circumstances that led to the sudden dismissal of a factory worker. A Paravan. A few days ago he had tried, to … to force himself on her niece, she said. A divorce with two children … He knew that the man of the house, my nephew, Chacko Ipe, was- is- away in Cochin. We were three women alone in the house: She paused to let the Inspector imagine the horrors that could be visited by a sex-crazed Paravan on three women alone in a house (259 - 260).

Ammu was humiliated in the police station by the Police Inspector Thomas Mathew when “she told him that there had been a terrible mistake and that she wanted to make a statement” (7). The Police Inspector retorted by saying that police won’t take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children. The Police Inspector was convinced of the fact that “What the Paravan had taken from the Touchable Kingdom had not been snatched but given” (259-260). Velutha was a
cardholder of the Communist Party and as a last resort he approached Comrade Pillai to set the things right in the police station. Pillai refused to extend any support to Velutha, saying:

Party was not constituted to support worker’s indiscipline in their private life… It is not in the party’s interests to take up such matters. Individual’s interest is subordinate to the organization’s interest. Violating Party Discipline means violating Party Unity (287).

The Police Inspector had summoned Comrade Pillai to the police station to enquire more about Velutha, whether he had any political support. Comrade Pillai had given the verdict to the Police Inspector about Velutha that he was acquainted with him but concealed certain important facts. He didn’t disclose to the Police Inspector that Velutha was a cardholder of the Communist Party and that he had approached him for help on the previous day. Comrade Pillai didn’t help Velutha at the crucial moment and it was a deliberate attempt from Pillai’s part to eliminate Velutha from the factory. Velutha dies in the police custody after having “abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor” (310). Comrade Pillai could have helped Velutha as he was the cardholder of the Communist Party, but he didn’t get any support from the party. In God’s Own Country “Marxism was a simple substitute for Christianity” and yet it was powerless to redeem Velutha (66). Though religion and political parties always roar out for the upliftment of the oppressed, they often neglect them as in the case of Velutha. The novelist observes, “And there it was again. Another religion turned
against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature” (287).

2.5 Conclusion

Subaltern themes have been depicted in their fullness by eminent writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Toni Morrison and Arundhati Roy. These writers had an inner thirst within them to celebrate the fragments of subaltern identity. The conditions of the subalterns vary in each sub-continent and these writers have catered to the immediate needs of the people. The individual attention to the problems of the subalterns by the writers have resulted in a progressive change in the society. Mulk Raj Anand bags the credit for exposing the theme of untouchability in Indian Literature for the first time. His humanistic approach and secular outlook in *Untouchable* paved way for the inclusion of more constitutional rights to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He cultivated among people the good values of brotherhood and fraternity instead of running after the institutionalized religions. As Anand says:

> I do not believe in institutionalized religion. And like Tolstoy, I would like to leave the beliefs of the people to their private conscience, collaborating with them for certain secular ends, without objecting to their pet religion (George 24).

The concept of physical beauty has been given undue importance by the consumerist society. The greatest threat that the world is facing today is the non-recognition of subaltern values. Discriminations based on racial superiority have
become the greatest evil of the day. The black feminists in the U. S. reiterate through their writings that the ‘coloured’ people’s identity is different and that they are not in any way inferior to the whites. Toni Morrison’s debut novel *The Bluest Eye* cautions the youth to be vigilant against the excessive influence of colonization. Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* cultivates a kind of hatred towards her own race whereas Jadine in *Tar Baby* is more indifferent in her attitude towards the people. Both these attitudes are wrong and when weighed against each other, indifference seems to be more harmful. In Toni Morrison’s writings the black people occupy the centre stage and she dedicates her time and energy for the upliftment of the coloured people. As Morrison says:

> When I view the world, perceive it and write about it, it’s the world of black people. It’s not that I won’t write about white people. I just know that when I’m trying to develop the various themes I write about, the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people whom I invent. It’s not deliberate or calculated or self-consciously black, because I recognize and despise the artificial black writing some writers do. I feel them slumming among black people. (Peach 5 - 6).

Subalternity of gender and caste dominate in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Women and the untouchables are subordinated to the dominant culture of the male world. They are rendered as destitute even in this modern era. As Prasad says:

> In the *Manusmriti*, the law book of Hindu social code and domestic life, we see the pathetic plight of the untouchable, who are deprived of gaining
knowledge particularly the Vedic knowledge. An untouchable, this book says, has no right to go to the temples; no liberty to listen to the incantations of the Vedas or the other great scriptures. They are also deprived of the right of reading and studying the language (5).

To fight the menace of untouchability, one should decolonize the mind to accept the fact that all are equal. Arundhati Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things* celebrates Velutha as the God of the small things and the God of loss. He is the Christ-like figure in the novel, and he is forced to carry the burden for the good of other people. Arundhati Roy as a post-colonial writer takes up the ‘small things’ in the society, such as the problems of women and the dalits. She immortalizes them as Gods in the society and celebrates their angelic existence.

This chapter discussed in great detail the theme of subalternity in literature and how it paved way for combating the social evils. The next chapter is going to deal with Gayatri Spivak’s theory of subalternity. Her theory is based on the principle that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ and by ‘speaking’ Spivak means transactions between the speaker and the listener. Spivak’s theory of subalternity is relevant in the ‘art’ and ‘activism’ of Arundhati Roy.
Notes

1 According to Gramsci ‘Hegemony’ is an arrangement of domination by those who are dominated. Ruling groups dominate not by pure force but through a structure of consent, and culture is part of this structure that legitimizes current social arrangement.


3 A person who loves England and English things.

4 The third chapter of *The God of Small Things* is entitled “Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombatti.” Laltain and Mombatti refer to the powerful and the powerless sections of the society respectively.

5 *Veshya* is a Malayalam word for prostitute.
Works Cited


