Chapter III

The Politics of Cultural Resistance

The present critical and cultural scenario is characterised by a certain elusive quality which transcends pure definitions, absolute rules, unitary, linear frameworks and uncontested, easily accepted norms, concepts and ideas. It encompasses categories which are contested, dialogic, dialectical and discursive. Literature, culture, identity, articulation, ideology and resistance are terms carrying within themselves contested and fluid dimensions.

Literature has been considered a linguistic construct till recently. It has been perceived as a space where linguistic signs often produce simplistic one-to-one referential meanings and underlying concepts. With the advent of Cultural Studies, literature ceases to be a mere linguistic construct, but becomes a potent cultural construct. Words are no more mere arbiters of referential meanings, but each utterance becomes an expression carrying cultural, ideological and political weight. They are used as tools creating and recreating, subverting and demolishing binary opposites of self/other, dominance/subservience, good/bad, culture/nature and so on.

Culture does not represent an entity that is absolute and closed. It is rather a mobile signifier that enables distinct and divergent ways of representing human activity for a variety of purposes. It has become an important and much used theoretical and substantive category of connection and relation. The word culture is conventionally used as a noun of process
connected to growing crops: that is, cultivation. Having germinated from the soil, the concept of culture has been developed to encompass human beings: a cultivated person is expected to be a cultured person. However, during the nineteenth century it was apparent to the “cultured” that all persons were not equally civilized. At best, it was a condition to be aspired to and acquired by, in practice, the educated classes. At worst, the quality as having recognized as cultured was a product of natural selection.

Stuart Hall considers culture as “the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society“ (1996:439). Culture, for Mathew Arnold, is not meant to be the property of the few but what binds everyone. His notion of culture seeks to do away with classes. For him culture

... is a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through, this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically. (1869: viii)

Culture provides a common ideal that can unite all in pursuit of perfection. Culture is concerned with questions of shared social meanings.

Cultural Studies, for Tony Bennett, “is concerned with all those practices, institutions and systems of classification through which there are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competencies, routines of
life and habitual forms of conduct" (1998: 28). The notion of culture identifies broadly those patterns of human knowledge that refer to the customary beliefs, social formations and traits of racial, religious, or social groups. It is applied to assemblages of social practices defined periodically and in terms of race, belief and class.

Michele Barrett signals other determinations of culture:

In the contemporary world, where migration and diasporization have produced more complex and hybrid cultural identities, the generic descriptions of culture as a way of life have become far more complex. This points to issues of ‘cultural difference’ and the question of whether and how we could, or should, translate experience. (1980:2)

Barrett’s attention is on the complexity of the notion of culture and on the questions of ethnicity and difference and to social hierarchies of culture.

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* sees culture as a field of possibilities.

The culture of a group or class is the peculiar and distinctive way of life of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life. Culture is the distinctive shapes in which this material and social organization of life expresses itself. Cultures are objectivated
maps of meaning, which both express and constrain: they are pre-
constituted fields of possibilities. (1993: 10)

Rituals, mores and customs, tradition and practices all become the expressions through which culture and cultural resistance are practised.

Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* connects nationalism with cultural systems:

What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as—against which it came into being. (1991: 12)

Anderson finds the emergence of national consciousness as an extension of cultural significations. He considers national upsurges as functions of “cultural roots” rather than “self concsciouly held political ideologies” (1991:12).

Culture refers to the questions of shared social meanings and the various ways through which a sense of the world is made. However, meanings are generated through signs. Hence the investigation of culture has become closely entwined with the study of signification. Cultural Studies has proved that language is not a neutral medium for the formation of meanings and creation of knowledge related to an independent objective world outside language: rather it is constitutive of those very meanings and knowledge: “Language gives meaning to material objects and social practices that are brought into view by language and made intelligible to us in terms which language delimits“ (Barker,2004:45). These processes of production of meaning are signifying
practices. In order to understand culture it is necessary to explore how meaning is produced symbolically as forms of representation.

Cultural Studies centres on the questions of representation with special emphasis on the ways by which the world is socially constructed and represented. The central strand of Cultural Studies is the study of culture where this concept is understood to mean the signifying practices of representation set within the social and material contexts of production, circulation and reception. Cultural Studies sees identity as discursive constructions. An individual’s cultural identity is shaped by factors such as race and ethnicity, age, gender, family configuration, religion, socio-economic status, education, occupation, sexual orientation, political ideology, stage of acculturation and place of upbringing. Cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as he/she is influenced by his/her belonging to a group or culture. The very notion of what it is to be a person is a cultural question and without language the very concept of identity would be unintelligible to us.

The popular cultural repertoire of the Western world considers identity a universal and timeless core, an essence of the self that is expressed, the representations that are recognizable in themselves. It considers identity an essence signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. However, Cultural Studies points out that rather than a timeless essence, a person is said to be plastic and changeable, a being specific to particular social and cultural conjunctures. Identity is not simple, but a site for a complex gathering of personal and impersonal histories, texts, discourses, beliefs, cultural assumptions and ideological interpellations. When “I” is spoken,
a focal or suturing point within the discursive, psychic, historical, national, gendered and ideological network constituting an identity is implied. Identity is continually being produced within the vectors of resemblance and distinction.

Identity is not a product but a process of unfolding meaning.

Identity is a flux, a fluid process. There are, however, numerous traces which give the sense of stability to an identity. In this context, Irvin Cemil Schick observes:

A person’s identity does not vary significantly from day to day, so that there must be a slowly varying envelope containing and constraining the vicissitudes of self-enactment. This envelope is narrative. (qtd. in Wolfreys, 2004: 97)

The matter of identity formation is a matter of narration. Identity is its own construction and narrative is the medium through which that construction is realized. The attempt of the subalterns especially the gendered subalterns, to create life narratives is an attempt to affirm their identity.

Identity is not politically neutral; but it is political in nature. There is the possibility of multiple, shifting and fragmented identities that can be articulated together in a variety of ways. It is the very plasticity of identity that makes it politically significant. Iris Marion Young points out in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference*:

Identity politics as a mode of organizing is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; that is, that one's identity as a woman or as a Native American, for example,
makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping, erasure, or appropriation of one's group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness. (1990: 23)

Identity politics starts from the analyses of oppression. It can variously recommend, reclaim, redescribe, or transform previously stigmatized accounts of group membership. The scope of political movements that may be described as identity politics is broad. It varies from struggles within Western capitalist democracies to indigenous rights movements worldwide, nationalist projects, or demands for regional self-determination. The struggle of the tribals to reclaim and assert their identity as exemplified by C.K Janu’s *Mother Forest* and the struggle of the sex workers to destigmatise themselves by demanding professional status to sex work as advocated in Nalini Jameela’s *Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, all become part of the wider struggle of identity politics.

The new identity politics is a politics of difference. It is the difference that is seen as the signification of identity. While doctrines of equality underline the notion that each human being is capable of deploying his or her reason or moral sense to live an authentic *live qua* individual, the politics of difference has appropriated the language of authenticity to describe ways of living that are true to the identities of marginalized social groups. It is also recognised that different groupings not only differ from the white heterosexual norm favoured by Enlightenment thought, but also differ amongst themselves. Difference is simultaneously political and ontological; it is also semantic. The meaning or
identity of one entity is recognised according to its manifest difference from another entity.

Jean-Luc Nancy explores difference as constitutive of identity:

The subject’s identity is related to difference in three ways. It is opposed to difference in general, in so far as difference creates the disparity or exteriority of being outside the self, or in so far as it posits that otherness with respect to which the identical pulls itself together from itself and upon itself. But identity, while pulling itself together, assumes and reabsorbs within itself the differences that constitute it; both its difference from the other, whom it posits as such, and its difference from itself, simultaneously implied and abolished in the movement of grasping itself. In this way, finally, identity makes difference: it presents itself as preeminently different from all other identity and from all non identity. Being the very movement proper to self-consciousness, identity therefore makes difference itself, difference proper and this property designates or denotes itself as man. (qtd. in Wolfreys, 2004: 9-10)

There is both the difference within, which is productive of identity, and externalized difference between an identity and its Other. Identity knows and determines its selfhood by identifying what it is not, what is other than itself.

It is the same logic that determines racial and sexual difference: the concrete examples of the strategic hierarchization between the self and its
Other, where the self assumes the role of a conceptual absolutism. Despite the attempted hierarchization, the figure of difference reveals that the self is only capable of constructing its identity through a registration of difference as many negative traces. In this matter, Ann Pellegrini points out: “. . .it is self-identity that must always look anxiously outside for its confirmation, disavowing any relation between inside and outside, self and mirroring image” (1997: 7). She means that self identity rules out the connection between the performative external identity and the essential internal identity.

Since difference is seen as the primary norm of one’s identity, the easiest way to obliterate the sense of identity in marginalised groups is to obliterate their difference. Attempts at homogenization is operative in different fronts of cultural scenario including literature. Literature being a cultural space always creates and recreates equations of hegemony and binary oppositions like self/Other, civilised/ savage and so on. Language, like culture, is always a contested space. Homogenisation essentially is a political act. This attains dialectical magnitudes if the group involved is the subaltern class, especially the gendered subaltern. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak finds the question of representation a problem. She observes:

> The question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem... all get bogged down in the act of homogenization; constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others. (1993:198)

Spivak, being an academic figure invited to represent the third world in international platforms, encounters the problem of homogenization and the
politics it involves at a more personal front. In an exclusive interview with Sneja Gunew on the questions of multiculturalism, Spivak shares her concerns in this regard:

The question of ‘speaking as’ involves a distancing from oneself. The moment I have to think of ways in which I will speak as an Indian, or as a feminist, the ways in which I will speak as a woman, what I am doing is trying to generalize myself, make myself a representative, trying to distance myself from some kind of inchoate speaking as such. (1993:194)

She elaborates the point to resolve any ambiguity in this matter:

For the person who does the ‘speaking as’ something, it is a problem of distancing from one’s self, whatever that self might be. But when the cardcarrying listeners, the hegemonic people, the dominant people, talk about listening to someone ‘speaking as’ something or the other, I think there one encounters a problem. When they want to hear an Indian speaking as an Indian, a Third World woman speaking as a Third World woman, they cover over the fact of the ignorance that they are allowed to possess, into a kind of homogenization. (1993:195)

Spivak finds this act of homogenization and the refusal to accept and allow specificity a deeply political act containing within itself new strategies of cultural domination.
Culture is a site of ideological domination. As Stuart Hall puts it, “the absolutely essential relations of cultural power- of domination and subordination- is an intrinsic feature of cultural relations” (Duncombe, 2002: 187). The relationship of the marginalised communities including the tribals and sex workers and the mainstream society is essentially characterised by the dichotomy of domination and subordination. The mainstream society creates and perpetuates the power position by the veiled play of ideology. Ideology of the ruling class is imposed on the minority sections of society so as to continue hegemonic supremacy. Ideology is a system of cultural assumptions, or the discursive concatenation, the connectedness, of beliefs or values which uphold or oppose social order, or which otherwise provide a coherent structure of thought that hides or silences the contradictory elements in social and economic formations.

The culture industry has the power to constantly rework and reshape what they represent, by repetition and selection. This is to impose and implant such definitions which fit more easily to the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture. In this case Terry Eagleton defines ideology in its political context: “... ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation” (1991: 30). Inscribing the ideology of the dominant group into the cultural texture of the minority groups, the Others, is a way of achieving and perpetuating hegemonic balance. Ideology, culture, philosophy and their organizers-the intellectuals- are intrinsic to the notion of hegemony.
Hegemony refers to the cultural, political and intellectual processes related to dominant economic practices and activity within a given society by which domination of one class is achieved over another.

The normal exercise of hegemony on the classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always to ensure that force would appear to be based on the consent of the majority expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion - newspapers and associations. (Gramsci, 1971: 80)

For Gramsci, hegemony implies a situation where a ‘historical bloc’ of ruling class factions exercise social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes. This is achieved through force and more importantly consent.

Culture has got immense political potential. The politics of culture is not predetermined. Culture is pliable; it is the ways in which it is used that matters. Culture is not only a site of inscribing domination but is also a very powerful means of expressing and offering resistance. Stephen Duncombe in his introduction to Cultural Resistance Reader offers an appropriate definition of cultural resistance:

Culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and / or change the dominant political, economic
Cultural resistance can work to foster or retard political activity. It is often seen as an attempt to assert one’s own cultural heritage and identity against an oppressive operative force that tends to obliterate its very subjectivity.

Cultural resistance can provide a sort of free space for developing ideas and practices. Freed from the limits and constraints of dominant culture, one can experiment with new ways of seeing and being and develop tools and resources for resistance. Equipped with new ideas and skills, confidence and comrades cultural resistance works as a kind of stepping stone into political activity.

Cultural resistance can be thought of as political resistance. Politics is often considered essentially a cultural discourse, a shared set of symbols and meanings. The rewriting of cultural discourse, then, is a political act in itself. There are two ways in which culture conveys its politics. A message can travel through the “content” of culture and it can also be transmitted through the “form” culture takes. How culture is received and interpreted determines its politics as well. Content and medium may carry a message, but the meaning and potential impact of that message lie dormant until interpreted by an audience.

The very activity of producing culture has a political meaning. In a society built around the principle that we should consume what others have produced for us, throwing an illegal warehouse rave or creating an underground
music label, creating one’s own culture takes on a rebellious resonance. The first act of politics is simply to act.

Duncombe gives an overview of the scales of resistance or spectrum of political engagement. He points out that on one side of the scale is the culture that may serve the functions of resistance, but was not created with that in mind, nor with the idea that its participants understand it as such. The other pole is occupied by the culture consciously created for political resistance and used for that purpose. Somewhere in the middle is the culture appropriated for ends for which it is not intended. Culture that is not meant to be rebellious can be turned and used for political ends, and conversely, culture that is self-consciously fashioned with rebellion in mind can be made to serve very non-rebellious purposes.

Sometimes resistance can be acted out by an individual, creating or perhaps living out a culture that may challenge the dominant system to its very core. But that person does this in his own head, within his own little world, sharing it with no one. Then there is the subculture, a group that has been cut off, or more likely has cut itself off, from the dominant society in order to create a shared, inclusive set of cultural values and practices. An entire society can also be engaged in cultural resistance in this manner.

The results of cultural resistance can range from survival to revolution. Survival is the point at which cultural resistance is merely a way to put up with the daily grind and injustices of life while holding on to a semblance of dignity. Rebellion is where cultural resistance contributes to political activity against the powers of oppression. C.K Janu’s *Mother Forest* and Nalini Jameela’s
The Autobiography of a Sex Worker provide instances of both these forms of resistance employed by tribals and sex workers as part of their strategy to effect meaningful existence. Results of this resistance may range from suffering repression to forcing meaningful reform; yet all of this occurs within the framework of the dominant power. Revolution is the complete overthrow of the ruling system and a time when the culture of resistance becomes just culture (Duncombe, 2002: 7-8). Subalterns, especially gendered subalterns, find that dignified existence is nearly impossible without power of cultural resistance.

Cultural resistance is not some specimen, anesthetized, classified and mounted on a pin, but constitutes a lively, ongoing and sometimes cantankerous debate. What matters in all attempts of cultural resistance is the political use to which culture is put. The idea of culture as something created and debated through politics and history is the subject of Raymond William’s seminal work of Cultural Studies, Culture and Society. Williams realizes that both the culture we enjoy and the culture in which we live provide us with ideas of how things are and how they should be: frameworks through which to interpret reality and possibility. They help to account for the past, make sense of the present and dream of the future. Duncombe points out that culture can be used as a means of resistance, a place to formulate other solutions. In order to strive for change one has to first imagine it, and culture is the repository of imagination (2002: 35). Culture as a repository of imagination helps one to first imagine resistance and then use it as a powerful platform for articulating resistance.
Antonio Gramsci finds political power as resting on cultural hegemony. Creating a counter hegemonic culture is part of any revolutionary project. If this culture is to have real power, it must come out of the experiences and consciousness of people. The job of the revolutionary, according to him, is to discover the progressive potentials that reside within the popular consciousness and from this material fashion a culture of resistance.

The play of resistance can take up numerous forms. It can range from very overt, organized revolutions to more subtle and nuanced everyday forms of resistance. Instances of cultural resistance offered by communities forced to suffer at various fronts by the dominant class of society is evident in history. The Peasants Revolt of 1381 in England may be considered the first recorded evidence of cultural resistance. Christopher Hill speaks about another such act of resistance in his essay “Levellers and True levellers.” He presents how in 1649 a group of landless commoners, radicalized by the English Civil war and disappointed by its less than radical outcome, occupied a hill outside London, planting crops and issuing manifestos calling for the earth to be a common treasury. The crops did not grow and the commoners were soon forcibly evicted, but Hill points out that their action was a cultural one, through and through and that their act of resistance has reverberated ever since. This is one of the earliest instances of cultural resistance offered by a community who dared to reject the culture of class and property and attempted to conjure up a new universe.

Countless times throughout the day every individual thinks and acts through a culture which reflects and reinforces a dominant way of seeing and
being in this world, or we think and act in ways which challenge and undermine this culture. While these everyday events frequently take place in the margins of what is commonly understood as politics, these cultural practices are, indeed, political. Michel de Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* finds that

Lots of everyday practices are tactical in this sense. They often involve victories of the week over the strong, via 'clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, maneuvers... These in turn are based on really ancient, may be even natural survival technique. (1984: xix)

De Certeau finds that the concept of resistance is entangled with those of culture and power. He describes the different ways in which apparently quite distinct forms of cultural power are creatively adapted at the level of everyday popular practices (1984:67). They have enabled the subordinate groups to appropriate the resources of the dominant cultures to claim the space of the Other and use this as a means to subvert hegemony without leaving the cultural scene.

James C. Scott is one of the most eloquent defenders of a politics that does not look like politics. Studying peasants in Malaysia, Scott realized that a form of politics was being performed each day between the Malay peasants and landowners who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents and interest from them. These were not the open and episodic politics of land seizures or violent revolutions. Most of the forms of this struggle take stop well short of collective outright defiance. Their strategy is to resort to continuous activities more
covert and subtle, the use of the ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless groups, such as grumbling and gossip, laughter and laziness, stupidity and sabotage, foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and so forth. It is a culture of resistance by which peasants rebel against the psychic and material superiority of their betters. These acts occur every day and often out of sight of authorities. However, such practices slowly and silently wear down the power of the powerful, and even serve as an off-stage rehearsal for open assault.

Resistance becomes the weapon used by the weak to survive. In this context James C. Scott observes in his *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*:

Whereas institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic concrete change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert and concerned largely with immediate *de facto* gains. For most subordinate classes, the latter form of resistance has been the only option. What may be accomplished within this symbolic straitjacket is, nonetheless, something of a testament to human persistence and inventiveness. (1985:33)

This kind of stubborn resistance is especially well documented in the vast literature on American slavery, where open defiance was normally foolhardy. The history of resistance to slavery in the antebellum US south is largely a history of foot dragging, false compliance, flight, theft and cultural resistance.
The idiom of cultural resistance is seen acted out not only in the wider contexts of slavery and peasant revolt, but it is something to be met within the very common popular places like a McDonald’s. Robin D.G. Kelley in his *Race Rebels* gives an illustration of how resistance can be found among the black and Chicago youth working, and clowning in a Los Angeles McDonald’s. The employees at the McDonald’s were usually African Americans or Chicanos from poor families who were constantly bullied by the swing managers or treated as stupid by the customers. They found out inventive ways to offer resistance. These included accidentally cooking too many apple pies and Quarter Pounders near closing time, knowing full well that the left over could be taken home and altering their ugly uniforms by opening buttons, wearing hats tilted to the side and rolling up sleeves a certain way. Though silly at the outset, these simple acts of resistance have deeper implications as Kelley himself points out:

What we fought for is a crucial part of the overall story; the terrain was often cultural, centering on identity, dignity and fun. We tried to turn work into pleasure, to turn our bodies into instruments of pleasure. Generational and cultural specificity had a good deal to do with our unique forms of resistance… a lot of our actions were linked directly to the labor process, gender conventions and our class status. (1994:3)

The so called margins of struggle, though unorganized, often spontaneously battles with authority or social movements thought to be inauthentic or
unrepresentative of the community’s interests, are really a fundamental part of
the larger story waiting to be told.

Another potent form of cultural resistance is seen in subcultures. Subcultures are forms of cultural resistance. Wherever there has been a
mainstream culture, there have been those who have staked their position
outside. There they fashion their own identities and communities, customs and
style, constructing a culture of their own. Through this cultural lens they view
the world, dividing it into good and bad, in the process creating a system of
values and norms distinct from, and often in opposition to, those of greater
society. These are subcultures or microworlds created by those who feel they
do not belong to the world at large; the young, the passed over, the outcast. This
cultural space offers great political potential, for subcultures provide a place to
test out new identities, ideas and activities that deviate from the status quo
(Duncombe,2002: 135). Subcultures use culture to create a communal identity,
often in opposition to the identities offered up by the outside world. Creating
this identity is considered a political act, a revolutionary soul force that can and
will change the world for real.

E.J Hobsbawm finds in banditry a rather primitive form of organized
social protest, perhaps the most primitive that is known. In his Primitive Rebels
Hobsbawm pictures these primitive rebels as protesting against the wrongs of
the world by conjuring up and acting out a culture of resistance, removing
themselves from society and living according to their own code. Robinhood’s adventures formed the saga of a resistance to feudal excesses.
Bhulan Devi, in India, was the manifestation of a cultural resistance to the Savarna hegemony.

Cultural resistance can find its voice in cultural artefacts like music. Robin D.G. Kelley, finds in OG, the original gangsta in rap music an act of resistance. Like social banditry, gangsta rap is a magical response to political, economic and social degradation, a fantasy of gun-blazing, dick-swinging omnipotence. It is an indigenous cultural medium with which rappers and their listeners navigate and critique capitalism and racism.

Style is the most intimate of the media. The clothes one wear, how one speaks and even the way one walks telegraph one’s individual identity and group allegiance. Style can be used to announce cultural resistance. During the Second World War, young Chicanos in Los Angeles defied war-time sobriety and their second class invisibility by dressing in elaborate “Zoot-suits” an outlandish sartorial style of a killer-diller coat with a drapeshape, reat-pleats and shoulders padded like a lunatic’s cell. It was in the most direct and obvious way an emblem of ethnicity and a way of negotiating an identity. The zoot-suit was a refusal: a subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the manners of subservience. What they wanted was to flaunt their difference and the zoot-suit became the means by which that difference was announced. Style can be projected as a weapon of cultural resistance, first by appropriating the commodity, then redefining its use and value and finally relocating its meaning within a totally different context.

Attempts at creating a pure culture is bound to meet failure. Given that the struggle for a purified culture often ends in failure, other strategies of
cultural resistance have been developed. The most successful among these are hybrid cultures which use the tools of the master, carefully reshaped, to dismantle the master’s own house.

Stuart Hall recognizes in “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular” that cultures are forever in transition:

Yesterday’s rebellious culture is today’s commercial pap and today’s pap can become the basis for tomorrow’s culture of resistance. Within this shifting terrain what matters most is what you do with culture, that is the political use to which culture, all culture is employed. (Duncombe, 2002: 185)

It is not the culture itself that is political, but the use to which it is put; it is the dimensions of resistance inscribed on it that makes it truly political.

One section of society that has always been at the receiving end of discrimination, degradation, humiliation and consequent erasure is the tribal community, the so called primitives or forest dwellers. The culture of the aborigins or the natives has always been a space for the dominant culture to affirm and perpetuate the binary opposite of superior/inferior; civilized/uncivilized and culture/savagery. Anthropologically civilization is postulated as a historic form of social life that has evolved along a measured line of savagery, barbarism and civilization. The contemporary human groups in a state of, or carrying traces of, the original conditions of life are branded as primitive, characterized as a complete world; a mental universe with its own special cast or character, an autonomous microcosm, isolated, remaining always
within a small territory; a state of homogeneity and uncritical mind, with norms and behaviour conventionally patterned; a strongly ethnocentric ethos. The alternative term tribe is also used to designate these primitives. Tribe refers to a constellation of somewhat reformed aspects of primitive life, generally regarded as constituting a homogenous unit, speaking a common language and claiming a common ancestry, living in a particular geographical area, lacking in scientific knowledge and modern technology, and having a social structure based on kinship. The subtlety of the definition is that the tribe in relation to modern society is a separate humanity.

The etymological origin of the word tribe goes back to the Latin tribus, which referred to the three original divisions of the early Romans, and which has then been extended to any similar division whether of natural or political origin. The meaning that the *Oxford Dictionary* gives for the word is “a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor” (qtd.in Lewis, 1989: 140). More recently, the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* suggests that “the unnecessary moralistic overtones that this usage implies can be minimized by the use of the expression tribal society” (Lewis, 1989: 146). The *Dictionary of Anthropology* still denotes the word tribe as “a territorially defined political unit” (Winick, 1960: 546). The word has been defined neutrally but rather restrictively as “a social group, usually with a defined area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization” (Winick, 1960: 547). Tribe is a socio-political unit confined to a territory with distinct culture and dialect.
Another term used to designate tribes is *adivasis*, which though seemingly innocent is political through and through. Ādivāsīs, literally "original inhabitants," or tribal people comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. Indian tribals are also called Atavika, meaning, forest dwellers, in Sanskrit texts, or Vanvasis or Girijans, that is, hill people. Tribal people are particularly numerous in the Indian states of Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, and in extreme northeastern states such as Mizoram. Officially recognized by the Indian government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, they are often grouped together with Scheduled Castes in the category "Scheduled Castes and Tribes." The designation, invented by the British, covers somewhat arbitrarily 255 ethnic communities which are economically and socially least advanced and are the earliest inhabitants of India. The English called them aborigins. The tribal communities, which live in isolated and self-contained communities, are considered wholly distinct from the mainstream, both culturally and ethnically.

Out of the total one billion Indians, the tribal population accounts for nearly 6% of the population. The tribal people are a vast majority in the Northeastern States and some Union Territories: 88% of Nagaland, 80% of Meghalaya, 70% of Arunachal Pradesh population is tribal. Half of the country’s tribal population is found in the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. The numerically dominant tribes are the Dravidian Gonds of Central India, the Munda Bhils of Western India, and the Munda Santals of Eastern India.
In Kerala there are still 37 Scheduled Tribes out of 48 tribal communities; their number is 1.26% of the state’s population. Among the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala the numerically dominant ones are the Pulayans, Paniyans, Maratis, Malayarayar, Kurumans, Kurichiyans, and Irulas. Though included under the same category of scheduled tribes, there are subtle differences between each of these units, in questions of culture, identity, way of living, being and thinking. In this context, K.S Singh points out: “We must be sensitive to inter-tribal diversity and recognize that there is not one tribal system but many. We must be aware of intra-tribal differentiation as well”(1985: 1). Even among the tribal communities, there are many subcultures.

The tribals have always been designated to the periphery of mainstream culture, stigmatizing them as savages, uncivilized and uncouth. There has always been an invisible barrier between the mainstream culture and the tribal culture. The tribal culture is a rich storehouse encompassing traditions, modes, religion, way of living that are typical to each tribal community. Theirs is an existence away from the mainstream, and they are essentially different from those occupying the centre, the limelight of social existence. But difference is not a token of inferiority. Rather, it is their very difference, their very uniqueness that is the source of their dignity, self-identity and meaningful existence. What they look for is a celebration of this difference. It is in this difference that their identity is firmly rooted. The marks of their difference can be seen in their unique cultural practices, rituals, religious ceremonies, customs, folklores, songs, oral tradition, dress codes, habits of eating, living, habitats,
house construction, manner of earning livelihood, cultivation, so on and so forth.

A number of traits have customarily been seen as establishing tribal rather than caste identity. These include language, social organization, religious affiliation, economic patterns, geographic location, and self-identification. Recognized tribes typically live in hilly regions somewhat remote from caste settlements. Unlike castes, which form part of a complex and interrelated local economic exchange system, tribes tend to form self-sufficient economic units.

For most tribal people, the rights to use land traditionally derive simply from tribal membership. Tribal society tends to be egalitarian, with its leadership based on ties of kinship and personality rather than on hereditary status. Tribes typically consist of segmentary lineages whose extended families provide the basis for social organization and control. Tribal religion recognizes no authority outside the tribe.

Any attempt to bring the tribal community before the glance of the objective world outside is an attempt to perpetuate the equations of cultural hegemony. For the process of bringing them before the so called sophisticated society involves further stigmatizing them as objects of study, as Others that need to be theorized about. Attempts at theorising or evenising them with either generalisations or seeking paradigms implicit in the native society have been
made frequently. In this regard, Aavadesh Kuamr Singh points out in his essay, “Theorising/Narrating Resistance and Colonisation in India”:

Theorising resistance is more complex for (1) the resisted gets interwoven in the texture of the discourse of resistance (2) the strategies of the resisted have been so subtle, sophisticated and chameleon like that theorising courts essentialisation of the colonised in particular. (2005: 72)

In the attempts to represent them tribal community and culture are thus reduced to objects of scrutiny, objects of curiosity. This stance is essentially devoid of the respect and dignity that the tribal culture intrinsically demands.

The attempt of the elites of society to represent the marginalized is imbued with epistemological, ideological, semantic and political dialectics. The question is one of the ability to empathise and not sympathise; for sympathy further involves the equations of superior/inferior. What Mahasweta Devi says in an interview with her translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is important in this context:“The tribals and the mainstream have always been parallel. There has never been a meeting point. The mainstream simply doesn’t understand the parallel” (1998: x). The attempt by the mainstream to represent the subaltern involves poignant issues that evade easy solutions. Representation often degenerates into commodification. Spivak describes it as “an academic’s desire to musemize a culture left behind” (1998: xxiv). It is a kind of showcasing the tribal culture.
Wherever intrusion into the tribal culture is met with, naturally forces of resistance have also come up. Privatization of land which had traditionally been considered tribal property, led to robbing the tribes of their means of existence; deforestation and forceful eviction of tribals from their natural habitats in the name of development have often been retaliated with resistive measures ranging from outright violent moves of public invasion of private property to silent and subtle measures of resistance. It can range from a public invasion of land that openly challenges property relation to the quiet piecemeal process by which tribes squatters have often encroached on plantation and state forest lands.

There are, however, very poignant and powerful measures of resistance offered by the tribal community against forces of oppression and assimilation. Their resistance is an attempt to preserve their culture, their tradition, their essential practices that make them what they are. Cultural resistance mostly takes on the most obvious form of preserving culture. A celebration of their essential differences from the mainstream becomes a potent strategy. The oral tradition, history, belief system, ideological domains, customs, practices, religion, faith, rituals, medical system, family values, dress code, habitat, method of constructing houses, means of cultivation are all preserved with an intensity that equals attempts to survive.

Articulation is another means of offering resistance. Preservation of culture and an affirmation of one’s self is done through the process of articulation. It is an expression and assertion of identity. But within the context of the tribal community such acts of resistance are few and far between.
And whenever they do occur they are often hampered by such limitations as lack of formal education, lack of access to the machinery to publish it and so on. However, such acts of resistance do occur and when they occur they offer rays of hope to the suffering multitudes; for it is from a spark that all destroying, all purifying fire often emanates. As Dasan says in his “Dialoguing with (Tribal) Text”:

Tribal literature of India in various oral traditions and regional languages do reflect the specific experience of tribal people, their worldview and spirituality. Their oral and written literatures tell the stories of exploitation, denial of land rights, human rights, and displacement. In short they narrate ‘what it means to be a tribal’. (2008:39)

The experience of being a tribal is very specific and distinct and as such was always outside the realms of dominant discourses.

The tribal question raises fundamental issues for our society, of social equity, ecological sustainability, peoples participation, of cultural autonomy and democratic integration. What the tribals are looking for is not the condescending benevolence of the elite, who rather seek to shut them within the coordinates of a theoretical framework but integration into the national society where their cultural autonomy will be respected.

Articulation is a potent mode of resistance. It is the expression of the self, its contours and boundaries, its depths and nuances. This mode of resistance gains an added poignancy and significance when it comes from
a community whose voice has been stifled for ages. It becomes a powerful and bold feat when the voice is from the margins, a voice which was not heard till now or rather a voice which was hushed down, cruelly suppressed by the mainstream society. It is an attempt to overcome imposed silence, an attempt to recover and assert a lost sense of being and selfhood.

C.K. Janu’s autobiographical narrative *Mother Forest* is a voice from the margins, the voice of the subaltern. It is a representation of a community always relegated to the margin. The translation of the oral text into English written narrative raises issues of ideological and political consequences, but the text is a bold attempt to articulate resistance and affirm one’s identity as well the identity of one’s community to ensure that their existence remains unchallenged.

It is the silence of the centuries that is articulated through the text *Mother Forest*. It is a subaltern text of resistance and as such gives vent to ages of protest and anger. It is a voice of resent and retaliation. The sense of forced subjugation and seething resentment is articulated, for articulation is akin to survival for a community suppressed for ages. Literature becomes a cultural construct for them. Literature is not for pleasure or joy but their articulation is the literature of necessity. It is rather survival literature for it becomes a platform for perpetuating the culture and identity of the community without which a community so rooted in culture cannot survive. Culture, as a signifying process and as a mode of representation makes it a platform for creating and subverting binary opposites of superiority/inferiority and self/other. It becomes a potent medium of creating Otherness as well as
articulating resistance and asserting oneself, one’s community and one’s tradition. Any resistance to authority brings into consideration binary oppositions of active/passive, violent/non-violent, hateful/loving, disloyalty/loyalty, inflicting pain/suffering, escaping/getting imprisoned and brute force/soul force. Janu’s autobiography is an attempt to wield culture as a force of resistance against the hierarchical, hegemonic structures of society.

Janu is a tribal activist who wages bitter struggles against the government for the land rights of tribal groups. She received no formal education but became actively involved in the literacy campaign in Kerala, proving herself to be a natural leader. Her work focuses on the promotion and defense of human rights, peace activism, and the demands of the landless tribal people of Kerala. She was part of the three-member delegation from India on a European tour organized by the Global Action Group, and the lone representative from India at conference in Geneva organized by the United Nations in 1999, as well as an active participant in the second Global Action Group conference held in Bangalore in 2000. By sharing her own vision of survival and ideas on the strategies to achieve positive development, she is serving as a voice for her community which has been silenced for centuries. In her autobiographical narration, Janu gives a passionate account of her struggle to get back the lands of which they were dispossessed. Without any means of earning a proper livelihood, her people fear they risk losing their identity also.

Mother Forest is an instance of native writing. The speaker is one who belongs to the substratum of society, one who is marginalized on more than one count. She represents the tribal community, the Adiyar community of tribes
to be specific. The articulating authority is the first person plural “We” standing for the community as a whole. It is not the experiences, frustrations, smashed hopes and story of exploitation and resistance of a single individual. It is rather the self of the community itself, the community of tribal women that is expressed and heard. Being a specimen of native writing and the native’s attempt of resistance at hegemonic structures, be it, cultural, political, economic, social or psychological, it resists easy categorization and interpretations. It is a resistance text and as such resists external and internal colonization. It evades familiar definitions and refuses to be shut within rigid theoretical frameworks.

Literature, being a cultural construct, is a medium of expressing, assigning and articulating identity. It is a site of constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing identity, especially cultural identity. *Mother Forest* is a communally articulated cultural construct. The identity that is articulated in the text is a communal identity. It is a subcultural identity as the speaker takes on the essence of the subculture. In this regard, Richard Dyer points out:

Identity politics is founded on an affirmation of the needs and rights of a group defined in terms of gender, class and sexuality. . . .Crucial to such affirmation is the construction of a sense of oneness with a social grouping. (1997: 7-8)

Janu’s voice has distinct cultural and communal nuances. The sense of oneness with her community and the articulation of the self primarily formed through the dialectics of cultural relationships characterize her work. Janu belongs to the *Adiyar* community of Wayanad district. Though her experience is universal
in the sense of it being shared by all the marginalized throughout the world, the
voice is that of a distinct subculture—the *Adiyar* tribal community.

The book discloses the marginal existence of the “tribal” people and the
oppressiveness of the structure that has imposed the identity to them. It reveals
the intent to dominate and oppress the people to whom the nomenclature is
imposed: “The aboriginal writings document the continuing struggle against
internal colonialism” (Dasan, 2008:39). The tribals are reduced to the lowest
level of the socio-ritual hierarchy of the Indic cultural system. For the simple
reason that they are non-Indic and remain outside the traditional Hindu Varna,
they are placed alongside the “outcastes” of the Hindu caste system. They are
displaced to the periphery and are often described and looked down as mere
primitives, savages, uncultured, uncouth and uncivilized. They are made into
mere ciphers to whom the mainstream society can attribute any meaning they
like. The book is a clear revelation of the various ways in which the civilized
society tries to erase the very identity and sense of being of the tribals. It
reveals the various machinations through which the tribal community becomes
mere tools in the hands of the mainstream community with their own
ideological and political motives. It is a transparent explication of how the
tribes are made to come at the receiving end, receiving nothing but various
forms and strategies of exploitation, humiliation and extreme dehumanization.
The attitude of the national mainstream that primitivizes and thereby
inferiorizes the tribals is in serious conflict with the proud self-understanding
of the tribals.
Identity is a form of representation, and the representation of identity, whether to oneself or to others, is in fact its very construction or manifestation. It is the socially constructed, socially sanctioned complex of self-significations derived from an individual’s membership in such collective communities as class, race, gender, sexuality, generation, region, ethnicity, religion and nation. The values and beliefs one holds are markers of identity: those invisible inscriptions on the subject’s psyche which determine his or her subjectivity and its relation to others around him or her. Identity is what gives one a sense of being. It is that construct which provides a human being the sense of self worth, a sense of existence. It is a construct that is cultural, psychological, social, racial, ethnic and communal: “Resistance is a concrete and ethical way of naming and defining the sufferer’s identity” (Dasan, 2008:43). The book articulates the distinct identity premises of the tribal community and the ways in which the mainstream society tries to obliterate this distinct sense of identity that provides meaning and clarity to the tribal existence.

Tribal identity is deeply rooted in their culture and tradition. Their culture in turn is inextricably linked with the landscape they inhabit. This is especially so in the case of tribal women. The tribal woman’s identity is fused with her landscape. Land is not an object for her, outside the realm of her consciousness. But it is a living presence, an objective co-relative of her interior landscape. Niranjan Mohanty in his“Inscaping the Landscape: The Poetics of Identity,“ elaborates on how landscape can attribute to identity:

The landscape is responsible for the creation of an inscape. The uniqueness, the distinction acquired or assumed by the landscape,
engenders in the inscape a paradigm and poetics of identity. . .

The inscape located and constructed are governed by love, freedom, fancy, imagination, colour, indomitable energy, fighting spirit of the mortals etc. (Singh, 2005: 115)

It is this kind of a deep and intense interlinkage that exists between land and the tribal woman’s identity. She is a part of it and it a part of her. It is a rather self reflexive landscape. It is the landscape that provides her her daily bread; it is in the lap of nature that she breathes, lives and exists. For man landscape is an object, an object of labour and survival. But for the tribal woman landscape is much more than that. It represents not an object of survival but survival itself, it is an extension of her own self and her identity. Forest is like a mother to her and she does not have an existence devoid of this all embracing, all integrating presence in her life.

Landscape becomes a self referential narrative for the tribal community, especially the tribal women. The forest means everything to the tribal groups. Janu speaks of her childhood and her life in the forest and the deep bond that exists between forest and the community:

No one knows the forest like we do.

She is mother to us.

More than a mother because she never abandons us. (5)

The forest, for the tribal community, is the ultimate nurturer, the provider, the one manifestation that they can firmly depend on. It is even more than a mother to them for the forest never abandons them. She is there as a constant presence
always providing them with food and shelter, warmth and a sense of identity, meaning and a notion of being.

Land is a synonym for survival for the tribals. They have no existence outside the parameters of the forest. They know the forest inside out. It is not an inanimate object but a lively presence controlling the contours of their existence. Janu while describing her childhood portrays the forest as akin to a human being:

When the virgin earth catches fire it gives out a strange smell. like it is being roasted alive. it is a scary sight when the hill catches fire. in the night it looks as if a human being is being burnt alive… when it rains the hill looks like a woman with her hair shorn, the wild water all blood-red gushing angrily. (1-2)

The tribals perceive the forest not as an object, inanimate and detached but see it as a human being, with its different moods and emotions. The forest is the solid rock on which the whole tribal community leans for strength and support, for identity and livelihood.

Nature is pictured as a provider of all sorts. It is a provider of food, fun, energy, hope, care and love: “in the forests one never knew what hunger was” (2). It is rather like a friend, mother, caretaker, guide and guardian. Forest acts as the background, an all encompassing soothing presence as the community revelled in their sense of togetherness: “when it grew really dark everyone would gather in the courtyard. we would sit for hours listening to what the forests mumbled” (3). Their life is an extension of nature herself.
The tribals exist in complete harmony with nature, always learning lessons from her. Her seasonal changes and shifts, rhythms and tones form a part of their life and existence, providing a beautiful tune to their survival both as individuals and as a community.

The equation that is imbibed by the tribal children right from the beginning is that the forest is synonymous with self and the outside society is the stranger: “if strangers came we just melted into the forest” (5). There always existed a wide gap between the tribal community and the mainstream society. The process of Othering and marginalisation relegated the tribals to the periphery and consequently they started perceiving the civilized society as the stranger from whom one should run away to survive. It is to the forest that they ran into, literally and symbolically for the forest is their abode as well as the metaphoric abode of their culture, heritage and identity.

Janu describes the intimate interlinkage that the Adiyar community had with the forest that they dwell in:

We created a system of life for ourselves through centuries of direct observation of the earth and Nature. We never had a problem creating a place for cultivation for ourselves, the implements, the vessels, a hut to live in and such. Though it did not conform to the needs of civil society, it was a system of life that was complete in itself. (47)

The tribals live in close communion with nature and they are self-reliant and holistic. The forest satisfied the physical, aesthetic, medicinal and spiritual
needs of these forest dwellers. They know nature thoroughly, learn from her and adapt their lifestyle to the changing moods of nature. It is nature, the earth that dictates the lifestyle, the means of livelihood, the food habits and the overall make up of the tribal community. In harmony with nature the life of the tribal community flows smoothly as the music from the *chini* with a rare and charming magic about it. The guiding principle of their life and existence is nothing but nature herself.

Landscape is not a material presence but an inward, all encompassing aura dictating the rhythms of tribal life especially that of the tribal women. Landscape is not merely an instrument of material production for them as is with the civilized society. But it is rather the outward manifestation, the visual icon of their culture. The landscape plays multiple roles in the mental, racial, psychological, collective, cultural, communal and social make up of the tribals. It is the landscape that breathes significance and meaning to the individual and collective repertorie of rituals and rites, customs and codes of the tribal community. Any attempt to rob the tribal community of the landscape in which they live and thrive is equivalent to demolishing their very culture and heritage. It is rather an attempt to devastate the very foundations of tribal existence:

The life style of our people, their customs and very existence are bound to the earth. This is more so than in any other society. When projects are designed without any link to this bond, our people suffer. (47)
Lured by the prospects of cultivating profit from the tribal lands known for its fertility and productivity, the government and later migrants started taking possession of the tribal lands. Power and pelf, empty notions of development and welfare proved easy explanations for the eviction of tribals from their own land.

As more and more land was taken from them in the name of development, tribesmen got alienated from their roots without even realising it. If the government took possession of the land in the name of "development," the local landlords extended their fields into their forests by offering the tribesmen intoxicants and mistreating their women. With a distinct culture, identity and a way of life, which they feel is in danger, their dispossession from their lands only re-emphasises their doubt that they are the stepchildren of the state. N. Prasantha Kumar points out in this context:

The tribal’s struggle for lost land has a cultural significance which is incomprehensible to politicians. From the perspective of the tribals the land is a structural paradigm of culture. The quest for the lost land is a quest for a culture invaded and vandalised, it is a quest to evolve a cultural identity. (2)

The loss of the tribal land is equivalent to losing themselves, their culture and heritage and its repossession is repossession of life itself.

The civilized society creates a sense of the Other, the marginalized among the tribes. They are always projected as the inferior, the savage as
against the binary opposites of superior and the civilized. This notion is deeply interiorised in the mental backdrop of the tribal community. Janu speaks of her experience of encountering people belonging to the mainstream society for the first time. It was during her journey to Vellamunda to work as the maid looking after the baby of a teacher:

it was then that I saw different sorts of men wearing Shirts and Dhotis. we had to walk keeping a safe distance from them. my mother walked silently without talking to anyone. (7)

The mainstream society was the one from which a safe distance had to be kept. The very presence of the mainstream elements demanded silence from the part of the marginalized.

The hegemonic structures of society inscribe inferiority, subjugation and subservience in the mental landscape of the tribals. This is done through the different cultural industries so as to aid in the perpetuations of the binary dichotomies of self/Other and civilised/savage. Hegemony is also effected through non-coercive means such as the dissemination of forms of knowledge which constitute and construct socially normative subject positions through institutionally authorized means and discourses like those of education, law, journalism and the media, religion, or, in a more diffuse manner, through the
very ideal of a normative or dominant culture itself. Antonio Gramsci recognizes such agents of hegemonic apparatus:

(1) the education system, (2) newspapers, (3) artistic writers and popular writers, (4) the theatre and sound films (5) radio, (6) public meetings of all kinds, including religious ones, (7) the relations of conversation between the more educated and less educated strata of the population… (1971: 356)

These agents of hegemonic domination represent the tribals through ideologically conditioned filters.

The image of the tribals projected to the world is a distorted one. It undergoes transmutation in the minds of the elite and a falsified, exotic perspective is what is put forth. Reality is hidden somewhere amidst the intricate web of manipulations and appropriations just like the film that Janu sees at Vellamunda with the teacher for whom she worked:

remember watching a Cinima along with Teacher…it was a Cinima called Chembarathy. people’s faces hands and legs looked so huge on the screen. this Cinima also had streams houses and hills in it. very unlike the hills we see in real life. (10)

The reality that is represented is manipulated one. There is a gulf of difference between real-ity and reel-ity. It is the same procedure of manipulation that has
taken over any representation of subaltern in mainstream literature. It is quite unlike what is seen in real life.

The intrusion of the civil society into the serene and pure tribal community disrupts the very equilibrium of the tribal community. The encounter of both only leads to a further subordination of the latter. The exploitation of the tribal community by the elite class society took on many forms including child labour, bonded labour reminiscent of slave system and so on. Janu describes instances of how little children were taken from the tribal community to labour in the household of the elites for negligible salary or food.

Scattered throughout the text is found the distinct characteristics of the tribal community be it the mode of life style, dressing, food habit, rituals or songs. It is these distinct traits and habits that give specificity to tribal existence. Culture for Raymond Williams is constituted by the tapestry of texts, practices and meanings generated by everyone as they conduct their lives. Identity is what gives one a sense of being, a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. It is the uniqueness of oneself or one’s community, the matter of it being different from others that gives one a sense of identity. Identity is a question of difference. “I am different and therefore I am” is the slogan of the day. It is their differences from the mainstream society that Janu tries to uphold, for difference is what provides them a distinct sense of identity: a self-reliant, holistic group of people with distinct sense of identity rather than mere vestiges of mainstream consumerist population. The habits of Adiyar community differ
not only from the mainstream culture, but there are distinct subcultural
differences too. They vary from one tribal community to the other. Even in the
case of language there are subcultural differences. The names of many objects
are different among the different tribes like Paniyars, Kattunaykkars,
Kurumars, Cholanaykkars, Mullokurumars and Vettakurumars. In the Adiyar
tribal community to which Janu belonged women never sang except when
putting the baby to sleep and then every woman of the community sings the self
same song with its typical tribal sonority:

    When the boy was howling

    Kaani veeranathi went looking

    for the chini

    when the girl was howling

    kaani veeranthi went looking

    for a flower. (11)

She also describes how the Adiyar community makes a typical musical
instrument called chini from the reeds. The music that flows from this
instrument straight from nature contains within itself the distinct reverberation
of the Adiyar community. The erumadam constructed to guard the crops from
wild animals at night, the single chela that the women robs themselves with,
The specific rituals when a girl comes of age, the simple ceremony of marriage, the *gaddiga* rituals for the dead and so on are portrayed in the text:

> In our community, there are certain rituals when girls reach puberty. We had to remain indoors out of sight of others for three full days. Later old women and elders would conduct some rituals. *Kanji* would be made from *muthari*. After a bath in the stream we had to wear a new *chela*. (20)

Each tribal community has a rich conglomeration of rituals and customs typical to it. These rituals and rites, customs and norms add an individuality and dignity to each tribal community. Rituals are the bonds that tie the community together. Preservation of their rituals is a strategy of offering resistance.

In Cultural Studies the laden phrase “identity politics” signifies a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around ideology or party affiliation, identity politics typically concerns the liberation of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim the ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination. Janu, in her autobiography, knowingly or unknowingly weaves the textures of identity politics. Hers is an attempt to reclaim the distinctiveness of tribal community, gaining strength from experiences of shared injustice and she seeks to attain greater self-affirmation for each member of her community.
It is the distinct variations in their rituals, tradition, customs and codes that provide each tribal community a specific and solid sense of identity. Difference is seen not as a mark of inferiority, but is a scale of identity. The fervour with which Janu and her tribal community tries to preserve and protect their difference resonates with what Sonia Kruks says:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is \textit{qua} women, \textit{qua} blacks, \textit{qua} lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself \textit{as} different. (2000: 85)

It is their difference that makes the tribals what they are. It is these very differences that the elite society tries to obliterate during the course of their intrusion into the tribal community. For, destruction of their distinct difference is akin to demolishing their sense of identity. It is part of a calculated process of reducing them to mere ciphers with no sense of history, identity, self-esteem and voice of their own. Difference is seen as something that commands recognition and respect and attempts at assimilation are seen as attempts at degrading, devaluing and essentially erasing one’s presence.
Julian Wolfreys defines difference as a “motion or process of gradation; that which makes possible any meaning or identity” (2004: 58). It follows, therefore, that the best manner in which the sense of identity can be obliterated, reducing the subject to the Other is by demolishing the difference. Homogenizing done through different modes of representation including literature is one potent weapon adopted by the dominant, ruling class to perpetuate the equation of dominance/subservience. By homogenizing the cultural difference of the minority, be it native culture, tribal culture or subculture the so called elites of society tend to obliterate

The tribal society is almost always in the grips of hunger and impoverishment, thanks to the intrusion of the government and the migrants to the tribal landscape. They are often dispossessed of their natural means of livelihood thereby tasting poverty every step of the way. Janu describes the days of hunger that ate into their very being in touching words: “when we children squatted in a group a strange smell would come off us. don’t know if hunger has any smell” (5). This is similar to what Mahasweta Devi depicts in her play “Water”: “The one thing that’s most dreadfully real is the hunger gnawing at one’s stomach . . . there’s nothing more real than hunger?” (Dangle, 1994:109).

Fear, inferiority and slavery are constant companions of tribal life, variables imprinted in the tribal psyche by the civilized society.
Extreme poverty and hunger drove the tribes to work like slaves in the plantation of *jenmi* where inhuman treatment was meted out to them:

   when we worked in the *jenmi’s* fields we had to do whatever the *jenmi’s* men ordered. Since the *jenmi* was the only provider of work our people were quite frightened of him...at noon after work we got some *kanji*... with some salt and chilli to go with it. *kanji* was poured into a pit dug in the earth with an areca *paala* lining. One could call it *kanji-vellam* with more water than rice...when it rained we just stood and got wet in the fields. (13)

The tribes are treated as outcastes, the untouchables. They are mere animals of labour and are not even accorded the dignity due to human beings.

   Fear is the ruling force of the tribal community. Having been at the receiving end of brutality and exploitation in various modes and forms for ages the construct of fear becomes an indelible trademark of the tribal consciousness:

   in those days we were afraid of almost everything. the backs of our people seem to be so bent because they have been terrified of so many things for generations. when our people speak they don’t raise their eyes and that must be because they are so scared. (13)

The powers that articulate and perpetuate equations of hegemony in society make it a point to keep the backs of the natives bent forever. For their bent back
is taken as a sign of the elite society’s dominance and supremacy. It is this identity of subjugation, fear and lack of selfworth that is continually inscribed on them. Cultural Studies treats identities as discursive and performative. Identity is described as a discursive practice that enacts or produces a signifier which it names through citation and reiteration of norms or conventions. The tribals unconsciously perform and reiterate the negative identity imposed on them by the mainstream society and without even them knowing it that identity becomes a part and parcel of their self and body language. The concept of identity links the emotional inscape of a person with the discursive outside.

The manipulative *jenmis*, through crooked means which are quite alien to the innocent tribes, snatched the tribal land without qualms:

the hillsides the mountains the plantations the fields and what-not in that area belonged to them. after our forefathers had toiled so much to clear the woods and burn the undergrowth and convert the hillsides into fields they had taken them over as their own. that’s how all our lands became theirs. after the harvest we used to get grain as wages. (15)

The natural owners of the land are made to toil in their land like cattles of labour with the product of their own land given to them as wages. Humiliation, poverty, physical and mental scars were the unasked for bonus granted. As Janu points out: “we used to be very sad. In our community there never was a tradition of protesting when the wages were low” (16). Janu sums up the life of
a man and woman in the tribal society under the suffocating pressures of subordination and fear:

man and woman stay together. sometimes they shift to a hut of their own. they have children. the parents go to the Jenmi for work. the children graze his cattle. that’s all there is. frightened of the Jenmi and scared of others they live on with bowed heads till they slowly grow old. (25)

The bonded labour system or the Vallipani as well as the system of payment of wages annually only added to the predicament of tribals. Their life is reduced to an insignificant saga of bowed heads and bent backs. Dignity and self-esteem are not even deemed the possibility of existence among them.

The tribal community rarely ventures out of their interior abodes to the world outside. It is only during the rare occasions of festivals that the tribals go into the midst of mainstream culture. These occasions become explicit instances for the marginalized existence of the tribals, away from the mainstream society:

we would huddle together in a group and sit somewhere listening to the songs for some time. not sitting but squatting. that’s how we are…all kinds of people used to come for the festival but we never mingled with the others. we badly wanted to see Magic. we never knew how much it cost to ride the Wheel or watch the Magic show. we didn’t even know whether we were allowed to do all that. (16-17)
The extent of cultural Othering and marginalisation creating inscripts of subalternity is evidenced here. They are always distanced and isolated forming a seemingly inferior category of their own.

Tribal life and tribal culture have often been subject to objective glance from outside, a glance that often tends either to stigmatise them as inferior or obliterate their essential difference and thereby their very existence. Intrusion of the so called sophisticated mainstream culture into the corridors of tribal culture is one of the biggest threats that the tribes face today. Such forceful intrusion leads to a destruction of the purity, serenity and sublimity of tribal culture. In this context, Ashis Nandy observes:

In the rapid and radical changes that are sweeping through India, the tribals are clearly a very vulnerable group. Their identity as a tribal people is in effect negated and their identity as human persons all too often violated. (1983: 9)

The process of change first isolates the tribals, negating their identity and denigrating their dignity and then integrates and assimilates them in a forced division of labour into the lowest social strata as alienated, anomic, violated persons, without rights or dignity in the society.

Difference, the essence of identity, has been used to inscribe inferiority in different contexts in history. In the context of colonial discourse, difference is hierarchical and is wielded in oppressive ways. Within colonial discourse, difference is projected as a difference from a fixed or true identity. This typifies the metaphysical assumption which is political and ideological; the assumption
that the truth of one’s identity, which is fixed and absolute, can control a range of meanings by designating as different all those not like itself, where self is assumed absolute and therefore unavailable to any interrogation. According to this logic all colonized Others are imperfect copies of, but different from, the colonial “I”/Self. Even after independence the same principle is found to play its dirty game. The garb of the colonisers are taken over by the internal colonisers, the mainstream society and the tribals and such marginalised groups including the sex workers are reduced to the colonised. Any differences of these subaltern groups, be it cultural, physical, ethical, moral or sexual, are treated as abherrations that need to be triviliased and erased.

The hypocrisy of the mainstream society with their slogans of tribal upliftment and equal opportunities for the tribals is made evident in Janu’s description of the failure of the literacy programme:

it was when I was sixteen or seventeen that the Literacy people came to Chekkote. a girl belonging to the Warrier caste handled it…the Warrier girl would come for two days and then disappear for days. it was like recording something in her book and then claiming payment for it. not like any real intention to teach our people how to write. (20)

The innate emptiness of such welfare projects is a token of the hypocrisy of the elite community. The upliftment of the tribals is taken as a step to effect one’s own economic welfare. Sincere intentions and well-executed programmes remain just fiction.
The civil society’s intrusion into the tribal community is with the politically motivated agenda of homogenization. Homogenization proposes only to obliterate differences which form the key ingredient of identity. Obliterating difference is the ideological strategy they adopt to ensure the process of subordination. Introduction of formal education and invitation to work in mainstream society are extensions of such ideological strategies. The intrusion of the dominant culture into the framework of the marginalized culture is rather subtle. Karl Marx and Frederich Engels reason out that those with power to shape society also have power to shape our consciousness: “The ideas of the ruling class is in every epoch the ruling ideas, that is, the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (1970: 64). As these ideas are integrated into our everyday activity, they become normalized and naturalized, invisible. They become simply the culture.

Raymond Williams sees culture as a means of social control as well as resistance. Culture, can be used as a means of social control, more effective than any army. It is a shared conception that the way things are is the way things should be. The powers-that-be don’t remain in power by convincing us that they are the answer, but rather that there is no other solution. This is what the party does in the tribal community. The promising words of the party workers offer new rays of hope to the tribal community: “some one described the Party to us as something that will get us more wages” (21). But soon these hopes are crumbled into disillusionment as the reality dawns that the Party sees the tribals just as their vote banks: the party “used” the tribals for their own ends.
The tribal people were taken in large groups to participate in the Party rallies. The interest of the Party in the cause of the tribes is as empty as the slogans that Janu used to shout aloud without knowing its meaning. The Party had no genuine interest to give time or effort in solving the problems of the tribal community. The Party sees the tribals as mere instruments in making it strong. It is the same attitude of domination and supremacy that was meted out to the tribes by the Party which in name stands for the poor and the impoverished. Janu portrays a touching picture of how the tribals were taken for a rally to Kalpatta:

that day no one went for work. we left in a big Lorry covered on all sides with bamboo meshing. we must have looked like cattle being taken to the cattle market. (27)

The Party sees the tribals as mere cattles that can be used in whichever way they want.

Culture has been used as a weapon throughout history. Partly out of a chauvinism that believes one culture naturally superior, partly as a pragmatic strategy of social control, conquerors impress their culture on those they conquer. Any struggle for liberation must also include a fight for cultural independence. But the existence of an independent culture uncontaminated by the oppressor is exceedingly difficult. With the encroachment of the civil society and the migrant population the serenity, purity and sanctity of tribal culture and values are shattered. The tribals are dispossessed even of the
language they speak. Their language is typical Adiyar community language with all the nuances of the community essence in it. The Adiyar language incorporating many Kannada words is one without script: “the words used by the migrants and by civil society began finding a place in our language. Among our children who study textbooks, a rotten new spoken language has also emerged” (34). The process of homogenization operated by the civil society and the migrants leads to an intrusion of many mainstream words into the tribal language. The result is a kind of rotten language which fails to represent the tribal reality.

The migrants who encroach on the tribal land drain not only their means of livelihood but also the potentials and vitality of the tribal men folk:

They would give them toddy and arrack. The jenmi only took over our lands. But the Migrants took over our men too and made them toil. They would acquire all the good land on the hillsides on flimsy grounds. Most of our people had given away lands for a bottle of arrack or some good tobacco or a sari. (29)

The tribals are reduced to mere wage labourers by the migrants. Mother Forest turned into Departmental Forest. The natural habitat of the tribals, which for them is survival itself, has been snatched away from them. The new migrants divide the land into fragments and use them to grow commercial crops. It is this desire of the civilized society to dominate and denude nature and her life-forms
and processes, which environmentalist Vandana Shiva decries as a reductionist process:

In the reductionist paradigm, a forest is reduced to commercial wood and wood is reduced to cellulose fibre and pulp for paper industry. The tribal, on the other hand, does not treat the forest as a marketable commodity. He believes that it has a life of its own, which he respects and his own life is an inextricable part of it. (1989: 24)

The new migrants extract profit, instead of yield from the land. The tribals are always at the losing end:

When our ancestors cleared the woods, burnt the undergrowth, sowed thina and converted the earth into fields the jenmi and the migrants of that time would make an appearance. They would befriend our men, give them arrack or a small sum of money and transfer the land in their names. Our people, who had never had to keep record and documents for their lands, would once again have to work in those same lands as labourers and grow crops for the jenmi. At a wage that could not even keep hunger away. (32)

The tribals are exploited on all counts be it by the civil society or the jenmi or the migrants or the Party workers. Loss and dehumanization are the only savings on their account.
In course of time the tribal economy was progressively monetized and opened up to a host of money-lenders, traders, revenue collectors and such mainstream intruders. As Bipin Chandra points out in *India’s Struggle for Independence*: “These middle men were the chief instruments in bringing the tribal people within the vortex of the colonial economy and exploitation” (1998: 42). The exploitation of the tribals by middle men exists even today in diverse forms and modes. The introduction of private property rights in land led to a breakdown of the communal mode of production and control of common resources among the tribals. Large scale transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals and the commercialization of the forests saw an alienation of traditional tribal rights in their familiar habitat. Migration into tribal lands increased dramatically, as tribal people lost title to their lands in many ways – lease, forfeiture from debts, or bribery of land registry officials. By the 1960’s and 1970’s, the resident non-tribal shopkeeper was a permanent feature of many tribal villages. Since shopkeepers often sell goods on credit; demanding high interest, many tribal members have been drawn deeply into debt or mortgaged their land. Ajit K.Danda summarises the cumulative effect of these measures in the tribal life in cryptic phrases:

The cumulative effect of these changes was the gradual disappearance of the non-market mechanisms of control of resources and allocation of goods, resulting in alienation, further bewilderment, poverty and confusion among tribals. (1990: 502)

The non-competitive, non-accumulative, egalitarian ethos of the tribals were distinctly used to their disadvantage. The unequal exchange relation between
the tribals and the outsiders deteriorated dramatically into an oppressive exploitation of the tribal community.

Playing on the innocence and helplessness of the tribals the migrants easily take over the tribal land, the tribal men and the women:

Some say that with the arrival of Migrants our people started mingling more with the Civil Society. Our women have been used by the *jenmi* and by the people from the Civil society as well as by Party men. (29)

Women from the tribal community have been cruelly exploited by the Party workers too. Janu refers to the predicament of unwed mothers in ironic terms:

The Party and its workers have a great responsibility in creating unwed mothers. I do not know whether it would help the Party to grow if the children of Party men grew up in our hovels. Actually martyrs could be born of blood in this way too. There were many such women in Thrissileri who bore babies for a pinch of tobacco or a stone necklace or some food. (35)

The encroachment of civil society and the Party has demolished the essential value system of the tribal community.

The community, which was once self reliant and stable, has to depend on outside society for work and food. Since their cultivable land has been taken away from them, they have to buy things from shops. The result is a further
deterioration in their status. They become indebted to the shopkeepers. Janu describes the complete transformation of the once serene and holistic tribal community thus:

We had to go to ration shops for rice and wheat. Ration cards, electoral rolls, and numbers for the huts came into being. We started buying mulagu, thuvara and payar from the shops. Became indebted to the shopkeepers. More needs meant more money. We now had to buy medicines for fever. Injections and prescription slips came into existence. Our children began to hate the forests and the earth…markets came up selling clothes and vessels to us. Application forms became prevalent and were at easy reach. A new set of people appeared to fill up the forms. Our people were completely caught up in applying to whomever for whatever. They had no time to do even what little work was available… (32)

The tribal society comes into the rigid grips of extreme poverty and starvation. The disruption of the old tribal order, complete and harmonious in itself, proves fatal even to their existence.

Cultural resistance gives way to compliance when survival is in question. The dire situation of the tribals is such that their very livelihood is in danger. Some tribes succumb to assimilation and in the process drowns to
further depths of subjugation. What Marx and Engels point out is important to understand the psyche of the tribals who yield to assimilation:

... the first premise of all human existence and therefore, of all history, is that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’. Life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy this need, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life. (1970: 48)

Survival itself becomes a question of gravity to many tribesmen. They fall into the traps offered by the consumerist society and find themselves further immersed in degeneration.

The Party turns a deaf ear to the problems of the poor until there comes a situation where the Party is at a loss to find people to go for Party rallies and to sing and dance and to shout the Party slogans. Then they settle the agitations through behind-the-scene moves:

Problems specifically related to our people were not discussed much in the Party or the Union. The Party saw us as a vote bank only. Therefore issues related to our agricultural lands or better conditions of life for us hardly found their way into Party circles.
The speeches made in the Party classes were not what we could easily understand. They were full of strange words with hidden traps. They tried their best not to let us speak. (34)

The Party which always pretended to be with the tribals is in reality after power and pelf: “in our area the Party, the jenmi and the estate owners had grown to merge into a single giant tree” (35). The Party only serves the interest of the moneyed class.

The Party has no interest in the tribal issues except as pathways to increase their popularity and ultimately power:

The Party considered labourers and landless people as mere ingredients of their rallying songs and as decoration of their speeches. From great heights, they sometimes announced free rations of a kilo of rice. they made people excited by showing them statistics of uncultivated land. Made men and women lazy by telling them that their time was coming… it became one of the necessity of the party to keep this community poor, starved and incapable of resistance. (40)

The Party has corrupted the tribal folk by providing empty hopes and extending empty gestures of benevolence.

The civil society and the Party cook up projects apparently for the tribals but actually to fulfill the vested interest of the civil society. The tribals are
transplanted to a different environment where there is not even enough space to stand up straight:

Without drinking water or a place to relieve themselves, the image of group of unclean people was slowly being created. They took our girls saying they wanted to educate them, and put them into hostels where the very people responsible for them misused them for power and money. They imbibed only the wrong aspects of civil society. The way they spoke and the way they behaved became a matter of shame and degeneration. The way they dressed invited lewd comments... Unable to study or to pass the tests in the new syllabi they lost their balance. . . they became good for nothings by writing competitive tests and failing miserably in them, and the government ridiculed them further with figures that proved that our people were in a condition to compete with people from civil society. Certain ruling forces and power centres emerged who could stamp this society underfoot as a group of people who always failed. (48)

The natural balance of their existence is disrupted. The tribals are deliberately moulded into loose, immoral, uncouth, uncivilized, good for nothing beings. The continuation of the hegemonic equations of power and supremacy is guaranteed.

Uprooting the tribal folk from their own land in the name of development by the government is a master stroke cutting at the roots of the
very existence of the community. The tribals have lost their land, their forest, their woods, their natural habitat, means of living and existence to the migrants, the *jenmi’s*, the shop keepers and all other representatives of the mainstream civil society. The land which is like the breath force for the tribals has become a commodity in the hands of the civil society:

All land disintegrated at the hands of its paper-owners who lay them fallow, constructed concrete houses and grew shrubs… A great discovery was made that land was a commodity to be sold and bought. A society came into being that sighed heavily, worrying about Nature from the cozy confines of an armchair. (48)

Janu articulates her awareness of the materialistic, mechanical, hypocritical attitude of the civilized society.

The new generation of migrants have made artificial lakes and lawns in their backyard and with no qualms they have lamented about the loss of natural heritage. Loss of nature, her riches and values have just become an object for the civil society, the journalists, the activists to explore and explicate with an eye on fame and popularity. The only losers in the business of commodification and invasion is the tribal community:

In colonies our new generation grew up without knowing how to read, washing utensils in restaurants, doing menial jobs in households, becoming unwed mothers, listening to cassette songs and fooling
themselves that they were the black power behind the red power of the
ten-thousand-strong Party rallies. (49)

The tribals are made to live in a false paradise. They are so indoctrinated by the
civil society that only a few realize the pathetic predicament that they are in.

All through their history the tribals are seen as redefining and adapting
their culture, resisting and rebelling against outside oppression. Stephen Fuchs
distinguishes three responses of the tribals to their critical situation in the
present scenario:

One is that of rejection and regress. Only a few of the nomadic
forest tribes would opt for this. However, by far the largest
portion is ready to change their tribal ways of life and to go along
with the national mainstream. There are also tribals who look
for other alternatives in the hope of saving their tribal identity
and independence. (1965: 23-24)

Oppression and measures of creating Otherness including homogenization are
often met with cultural resistance. When survival itself is in question and the
outcome of resistance is often dubious, some tribals tread the path that the
mainstream society ploughs for them.

People with keen insight like Janu read between the lines and understand
the hegemonic ideology that is operative in each condescending step of
benevolence of the civil society. She realizes that all development projects
emphasise profits for the civil society. Shining roads which are built into the
colonies are not for the tribals who do not even have a bicycle. But they are
made for the bank vans that come to recover loans. Projects are designed in the name of the tribes, for those people in the surrounding areas with land, homes and skies of their own. It is a new form of colonization that sets in. The colonies that are built for the tribals are the colonies of the civilized society. The power relationship of the colonizer/colonized is still being perpetuated, though in a new garb. The tribal children are taken to hostels where they are without remorse turned into sinners. They return to the colony as people who have lost their minds, as the poorest of the poor. The so called sympathizers peep into the deterioration caused by the civil society and turn them into stories for cinima. Janu says, “Real colonies are created in this way” (51).

The sons and daughters of the forests, now evicted from them, have settled in colonies built for them. Life in these small colonies has no resemblance to that in the forests. Their old order of life, evolved through centuries of close association with nature, is slowly slipping out of their hands. Those who found water by making pits in the ground now have to fight for water supply. The outside world, providing them no water supply or toilets, has looked down on them as unclean people when disease broke out. Competing with a smart world, they have lost.

Industrilisation, globalisation, urbanisation and commercialisation— all have adversely affected tribal community. They invariably lead to a neglect and erosion of tribal cultures and the loss of tribal histories. Racialising tribal identity has a debilitating political cost. It undermines dynamic political and cultural traditions that signify surviving peoples and vibrant communities.
What the mainstream culture strives to do is either the annihilation or assimilation of tribes into it. This can only lead to a violation of their political and cultural integrity as peoples with distinct beliefs, histories, and cultural practices. Racialising the tribals into one monolithic indigenous race is equivalent to erasing the diversity among them and presenting risks to the specific knowledge and histories that they carry. It also leads to an undermining of the cause of tribal-specific political rights.

Changes originating from radically different cosmologies prevent the endogenous growth of a culture. In the case of tribal cultures, its consequences are far more disastrous. In *Tribal Thought and Culture* Baidyanath Saraswati paints the tragic consequences of mainstream invasion into tribal culture, be it in the name of development or as a strategy to perpetuate cultural hegemony:

The disastrous consequences include: a loss of cultural autonomy, that is, the self-contained tribal system becoming a sub-system; tribesmen live a double-life; becoming depersonalized, individualized; emotionally shallow, atomized, unstable and other-directed and finally suffer from identity crisis. (1991: 24)

Measures in the name of development often shake the very foundations of tribal culture and adversely affect all aspects of tribal life. The industrialization of their homeland resulted in uprooting the tribes from their cultural moorings. It reduced them to a state of cultural subjection, placed them marginally in the industrial organization, and forced them to a bi-cultural way of existence.
Dominant groups in the culture at large often insist that the marginalized integrate by assimilating to dominant norms. The demand of assimilation is that the marginalized conform to the identities of their oppressors. This leads to the erasure of socially subordinate identities rather than their genuine incorporation into the polity. The marginalised have come to recognize that attempts at integration of dominant and marginalized groups so consistently compromise the identity or potential of the less powerful that a distinct social and political space is the only structure that will adequately protect them. The attempt of the agents of hegemonic domination is to obliterate differences, to assimilate the variant into the main stream not with a notion of equalizing but with an eye on erasing the specificity that provides cultural esteem to the minority groups. Through assimilation and homogenization they are robbed of their essential identity thereby casting them off as vestiges of dominant culture.

Wherever there are attempts at homogenization to erase difference which is the hallmark of identity, there are attempts at resistance too. Whenever a cultural, ideological politics aimed at creating hegemonic equation is in operation, a counter politics of resistance also takes myriad forms. “The new cultural politics is the politics of difference”, says Cornel West (1995: 203). He elaborates the distinctive features of this new cultural politics of difference:

Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in the light of the concrete, specific and particular; and
to historicize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. (1995: 203)

He continues to explain the point to its logical culmination:

The new cultural politics of difference is neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or malestream) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather they are distinct articulations of talented contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality. (1995:204)

Celebrating difference and defying attempts at homogenization become the new face of cultural resistance. Articulating resistance is rather synonymous with articulating difference. Janu becomes the spokesperson of her community, recognising and resisting the threat to their existence as dignified human beings with a distinct culture and traditions of their own.

The postmodern outlook is to see difference as a token of one’s self worth and is considered something to be proud of. The new cultural politics of difference is all about celebrating difference, celebrating decentredness and fragmentation. The slogan of the new era is a flaunting of cultural difference in
all its multiple dimensions and facets. Simultaneously, the new method adopted by the ruling class to perpetuate the dynamics of superiority/inferiority is to obliterate difference and to homogenize. Homogenization is an attempt at depoliticising identity; it is an attempt at snatching away the political content of identity and difference.

The mainstream culture either try to annihilate the cultural topography of the minority or assimilate them into the mainstream which in an ironic way amounts to annihilation itself. Homogenization of the essentially different tribal culture is what they resort to; that too is done in a condescending stance of benevolence. Homogenization does not lead to cultural autonomy of the tribals, rather it is a process of cultural extinction, the very basis of tribal identity and dignity.

Homogenization is often done by covertly or overtly intruding into the native culture, infusing the principal elements of the dominant culture into the subculture, obliterating the essential differences, the uniqueness that makes it a rich cultural storehouse. Wherever such attempts have been operative, counterstrokes have also been evident. Across cultures and nations, peoples and races, cultural domination and homogenization have been retaliated with counter hegemonic forms of resistance as is evident in Janu’s *Mother Forest*.

Completely disillusioned with the Party which stands only for power and money, Janu decided to lead the act of resistance of her community. She has gone around learning the problems of her community thoroughly and has decided to engage in serving the cause of her people in whichever small way
she can, even if it is the simple everyday form of resistance. Clifford Greetz speaks of a cartography of spaces between total compliance and resistance of dominant culture inscribed with differentiated and uneven relations of power. This entails that resistance need not be the same: the different forms that cultural resistance assume depend on the political context that define the intersecting space of culture and power (1973: 154). De Certeau finds the practices of everyday life as a means explored by the oppressed to preserve their distinctive ways of seeing and doing that enable them to protect their alterity from the tyranny of the dominating culture. The subordinate class cultures net the practices of everyday life in a common problematic irrespective of the social location defined by overlapping spaces of power like gender, race, class or sexuality (1984: 67). These salient forms of resistance constitute the politics of the oppressed which has evolved as an essentially cultural strategy that can foil social transgression. They can thus fortify the survival tactics of the oppressed. Resistance has become an act of survival for the tribals. They have become the primitive rebels for they have no other choice. They resisted the measures to uproot them from their natural habitat, for their very existence and survival depended on their landscape. It is not just an objectified reality for them, but is a visual coordinate of their culture, tradition, heritage and existence itself. The tribals, led by Janu have been fighting for their rightful ownership of the land in Wayanad, Kannur, Palakkad, Idukki.

The struggle to retrieve their burial ground is a strong act of resistance. There came a situation where the tribals feared of being robbed of their burial ground. Janu, with her people went to their burial ground and built a fence
to separate it from the other lands. An approach road was also cut to the burial
ground. The encroacher- a man with money and influence -brought the police
and the tribesmen were taken to the police station. The extent of Janu’s
boldness and determination is evident when she resisted the measures to
suppress the struggle by making the women of the community stand together
and march to the police station carrying spades and other implements. About
sixty of the women squatted in front of the station insisting that they would not
leave until the land is returned to them.

Many similar acts of resistance were led by Janu who has become the
voice and self of the community of the oppressed. This includes her venture of
occupying a place near Appootti near Mananthavaadi sometime in 1994 and
building huts there. The forest guards came and beat them up and Janu herself
was in hospital for 20 days. But these oppressive measures of the civilized
society could not extinguish the fire of resistance that burned in them. Similar
encroachments were made in Vellamunda, Chiniyeru, and Kundara in Munnar.
Both the leftist and the rightist governments tried to break the tribal will by
using force. But nothing could hamper the spirit of resistance for the simple
reason that resistance is their only means to survival as individuals and as a
community:

the only reason our people did not run away was that they had no
place or land to run into… these were not just land
encroachments. They were life and death struggles for our basic
right to live and die where we are born. (54)
Resistance is a spontaneous response to oppression and it is a counter hegemonic move. In his celebrated work, *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott discusses the concept of resistance whose essence drives one “to exert oneself so as to withstand or counteract the force” (1985:289). The tribals have no alternative but to resist, for to succumb is to die. The mainstream, so proud of its “civilised culture,” have either tried to suppress or kept its eyes shut to the desperate struggles of the tribals for their homes.

The most significant of the strikes led by Janu was the one before the state legislative assembly in September and October 2001. The chief demand was the distribution of land to each landless adivasi. As the fever intensified, it grew into the most fierce campaign Kerala has seen in recent years. As a group of illiterate and economically disadvantaged tribals, facing stiff opposition from all quarters, brought the government to its knees, forcing it to agree to its demands, the whole nation sat up and watched.

But the sequel to the story is not a happy one. In January 2003, the Gothra Mahasabha (a collective of various tribal bodies) led by Janu forcefully took possession of forest areas in Muthanga in Wyanad district. The authorities tried to evict them, resulting in police firing. A policeman was killed. Many tribals lost their lives.
Janu describes the acts of resistance as acts to ensure protection of the basic rights of the tribals. Their landscape means life and existence itself for the tribals:

All our struggles have been struggles to establish the ownership rights of the real owners of this land for the right to live on it. It is true that civil society’s traditions and processes relating to land ownership are quite different from the traditions related to the needs of our community. That is why, for the sake of our sheer existence on this land, we are forced to struggle against all centers of power. (55)

It is a question of life and death for the tribal community. Victory is their only option for survival.

The source, strength and inspiration of resistance among the tribal community is the close knit relationship between the tribal women. It is the community of tribal women with an inherent streak of resolve and resilience who mostly spell and act out the play of resistance. This is akin to what Alice Walker calls womanism. More than any other section of Kerala society, tribal women enjoy considerable freedom without the constraining moral rules of the “civilized” world. They shoulder most of the work at home and in the fields while men laze around:

In our case, unity in everything originates from our women. They have something in common that shelters us from meaninglessly
adopting the ways of civil society. They have enough resilience in them to stand for what they feel is right even though they may have to suffer a lot for it. It is among our women that our traditions and the way we dress live on even now. Theirs is a resolve that is hardened by the wind and the rain of the forest and in the face of other difficulties. (53)

Janu believes that only through their active participation would there be any growth for society. The narrative suggests affiliations with other women, reflecting the narrators’ desire to contest the dominant discourses through which the female subject is objectified and silenced as part of a non-hegemonic group.

In Janu’s narration, the first person plural is often used instead of the first person singular. In her community the women can live independent of men and empowerment and emancipation have a different meaning in her tribal context. Her struggle becomes representative of the struggle for justice by the poorest and the most oppressed community in Kerala. According to Janu, women’s liberation and empowerment have different connotations in a tribal context, which she explicitly records: “In this world all power lies with civil society. This power is wielded so effectively that very little is known to the world outside”(53). She is well aware of the fact that forest flower beetles cannot argue with city microphones that make great noise, but she will fight unto death for the restoration of the rights of her people. Her narration is an eloquent testimonial to her convictions and courage in mobilizing a protest
against the government to restore the alienated land to the tribal people, enabling them to regain their sense of identity. Her autobiographical narration is not merely a retrospective summation of past events and experiences. She genuinely wishes to change the state of affairs in the community to which she belongs.

C.K Janu’s autobiographical account does not maintain a posture of humility and a non-aggressive tone, concessions that might have made them more palatable to defensive readers. But articulating real life experiences in the context of a judgmental system is a bold step. In her narration one can feel the strong individuality of the narrator coming into power. She scripts her experience for survival and to revitalize a borderline culture.

The civilized society’s interest in the tribal life is, at its best, materialistic in nature. What they have sought to do is commodification of tribal culture and heritage. The tribals are reduced to mere show-case pieces. Folk arts department has taken over their customs like gaddiga. For the civil society they are just paraded pieces for leisure. The civilized society excavates the tribal traditions and customs and celebrates them as products of the market. The sanctified rituals and rites, art forms and music of the tribals are dragged into the mindless clutches of the market. They are brought under the demonic forces of consumerism. Even the attempt to project Janu’s life story before the civilized world should be doubted as a reflection of the consumerist forces in action. However, the text Mother Forest, as expressing the deepest realms of a community subjugated for ages, for the sparks of resistance and resilience,
the bond and solidarity in the community, for the sheer fervour and sincerity in the attempts to preserve and protect tribal culture, is a bold explication of cultural resistance. It is undoubtedly a resistance text.

If Janu’s venture is to breathe life into the tribal community, rejuvenating and revitalizing them to fight for and uncompromisingly claim their rights for survival, Nalini Jameela’s autobiography, *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, speaks for a community of subalterns marginalized, stigmatized and even hated for centuries. She voices the concerns and causes of sex-workers, the most maligned group in the society. Nalini Jameela’s autobiography might be the first of its kind not only because it is written by a sex worker, representing the section of society that is burdened with subalternity on multiple counts, but also because it thwarts or resists the familiar expectations out of a book by a sex worker. The text is a bold specimen of resistance for it portrays in no-nonsense and bold terms the truth and poignancy of the experiences of a sex worker. The sex worker is in fact the most marginalized of the marginalized. Her oppression and suppression are characteristically different from and venomously more pathetic than the other gendered subaltern groups. Her life and existence is under the constant shadow of the ethics and morality of society. Morality looms as a demoniac all powerful presence in the life of a sex worker making her a polluting presence, polluting the very sanctity of the female ideal. She is the vamp, the siren who tempts man with her body and charms, leading him to destruction.
She is the Other not only of man but also the abhorrent/aberrant Other of the female ideal:

> Women working as sex workers are not considered as women. Being “good” is a necessity to be considered as a woman, and since sex workers are stigmatized as evil, deviant, debauch, worthless; they are not considered as part of the general body of women. (Seshu, 2008: 40)

If at all there is a community of women most vehemently hated and ousted by the community of women in general, it would be the sex workers. She is perceived as the witch, the very shadow of whom is a threat not only to morality but to womanhood in general.

The truth of the story of the life of a sex worker had never been brought to the limelight nor was it expected that it would catch the attention of the public the way it did when it finally got published. Nalini Jameela’s autobiography instantly raised a hue and cry from the varied quarters of life when it was published. It instantly became a best seller. It went through several editions and sold 13000 copies in 100 days. The 51 year old sex worker was instantly shot to the limelight with the publication of the work. If in the 70s Kamala Das caused a furore by making audible the voice of women’s sexuality, Jameela creates a spark by speaking as a sex worker, a description deliberately defined by her profession. Feminist politics or Women’s movements have never been able to clearly identify themselves with and voice the problems and concerns of sex workers: “The issue of prostitution brings to
the fore many of the contradictions in feminist politics, and the ambivalence in dealing with issues of sexuality, reflected both in Indian and Western feminist politics” (Gangoli 2008:21). The differences in the female worlds came to the fore only after postmodernism. The mainstream feminisms do not always see women in prostitution as being feminist.

Nalini Jameela refuses to be called a prostitute. She rejects this nomenclature not because of her desire to be enfolded in the complacent framework of the common home-centred female ideal. The term “prostitute” reverberates with moral overtones. As the Sex-worker’s manifesto of Durbar mahila Samanwaya Committee, one of the first organizations of sex workers points out:

The word prostitute is rarely used to refer to an occupational group of women who earn their livelihood through providing sexual services; rather it is deployed as a descriptive term denoting a homogenised category, … which poses threats to public health, social stability and public order. (qtd in Tambe, 2008: 89).

Nalini Jameela prefers the term “sex worker,” qualifying sex work as a profession just like any other. Jameela is not ashamed of her profession as is expected of a sex worker but disturbs the elite mind by demanding sex work to be accorded the status of a well defined profession, with corresponding dignity duly attached. The very word *thozhil* as used in the title of her autobiography means labour and profession.
Nalini Jameela’s voice is an oppositional voice in the Malayali reading public. It is oppositional not only on count of being the Other of man but also as being the abhorrent Other of the Malayali female ideal. The Veshya – the prostitute figure has always been marginally present in the female social consciousness providing validity to the notion of ideal womanhood. In the Indian society there has always been a bifurcation of women into *pativrata* (chaste) and prostitute. Nalini Jameela’s work shatters this ideal of the procreative, disciplined, family – centred feminine enshrined within the Malayali new elite. She speaks as a daughter, wife, mother and friend, and a public figure, with a name and a face rather than remaining anonymous. The multiple roles that a woman plays in life, like that of a daughter, wife and mother, the exclusive privileges denied to the sex worker are powerfully traced in her work. She writes in an elaborate “domestic” into her narrative thereby challenging the prostitute stereotype: “We consider our homes to be the most private of all spaces”(116). The rhythms and nuances of domestic life, the vibrations of familial love and the warmth of family relationships are stereotypically presumed to be absent in the life of a prostitute. Her life is rather considered to be a saga of sexual encounters. Nalini Jameela proposes to deconstruct the feminist hegemonic constructions of the sex workers’ life. She valiantly questions the complacent consciousness of the elite community and demands a place and a space of her own in her own terms, in the morally conscious, hypocritical society. She questions the underlying value systems at work that highlight only the negative aspects, without even acknowledging the possibility of anything positive about her.
Nalini Jameela’s work testifies to the oppression of the sex workers. It exposes to the public eye the world of the sex workers with the complex and intricate web of patriarchy, classism, double standards, morality defining the contours. They have been a completely isolated, marginalized community stigmatized and hated for centuries. Dire circumstances characterized by extreme poverty, impoverishment, unhealthy and unhygienic living conditions, the threat of fatal diseases, police harassments, safety, sanitation, issues related to human rights, literacy, health and above all, the burden of blame for moral degradation mark their existence. The sex worker is denied a space even within the spheres of sexuality, as if sexuality by itself is a mainstream attribute. For someone who derives her livelihood through the exhibition of her sexuality, this is denying the very reason of her existence. There is a strongly conditioned negativity of responses to her needs. Attitudes that demean her work and character go on further to marginalize her at every level of existence.

Nalini Jameela’s autobiography presents its narrator as performing different forms of work ranging from productive to reproductive to sexual. The different realms of the self as is seen in the daily discourse of life is brought forward. It also challenges the stereotypical images of decay associated with sex work, the most demeaning work and existence as per dominant ideology. Decay and sheer degeneration are the anticipated inevitable tragedy of their life. But Jameela shocks the elite society by providing a saga of resilience and resistance and claiming a life lived in her own terms. The work also highlights the ordinariness of sex – work in the lives of the poorest of women, its place alongside other arduous, abusive and debasing work.
The elite community seeks to forget or neglect the threat of sexual violence as an inevitable presence in the life of the gendered subaltern. Jameela points out that there are no clear cut boundaries demarcating the work place, home and the place of sexual labour as far as a poor woman is concerned.

Jameela’s life just like the life of any other gendered subaltern has always been under the constant shadow of fear and helplessness. The very first image of her memory reciprocates the deeply ingrained forces of utter helplessness. Her memory unfolds with the image of her 90 year old grandmother crawling towards her baby brother: “Etched in my memory is the picture of Father’s mother coming up close, on all fours, crawling, because she couldn’t walk” (1). This image imprinted in the tender inscape of the two and a half year old leads to a constant fear of helplessness and vulnerability. It also sparkled the need to be self reliant and independent, the urge never to bow down before authority, features that essentially mark Jameela, the woman/author.

Patriarchy as a dominant ideology is indoctrinated in the mindset of young children right from childhood. The position of a girl child, the limited extent of the expectations out of her, the marginal space she occupies in the decision making process is clearly presented to her. Consciously or unconsciously women also become accomplices in the process of perpetuating patriarchy. Nalini Jameela’s *Valyamma* extends the codes of patriarchy when she refuses Nalini to be sent to school: “This will do, she has learned enough to keep paddy accounts . . . Girls needed to know just enough to keep track of how much paddy was sown and harvested, she felt”(2). The desire to study was
thus nipped in the bud. Jameela’s mother, another representative of the laboring poor, whose voice and wishes were not accorded any significance at all in a patriarchally conditioned household, could do nothing to fulfill the desire of her daughter: “None of my mother’s decisions held any weight at home” (2). She rather becomes a silent spectator sharing the victimized space.

The circumstances of her life made Jameela recognize from an early age itself that “to be one’s boss, one had to work”(4). Being on one’s own feet is one way to define one’s self. Interfering forces and oppressive interventions proposing to assign inferiority to the self can only be banished by asserting one’s space and voice. As Marx says, material production is one of the bases of determining personal worth. The degraded existence of her mother teaches Jameela the dignity of work and importance of money in life. She remembers this lesson all through her life: “I saw my mother choke in this house and this made me realize that pride and dignity come only out of having money” (6). From the age of nine Jameela starts working, first as an ayah, then in a clay mine and later pursuing a series of jobs before finally landing on sex work as her profession. Pulled out of her school at the age of nine, Jameela begins to work in a clay mine; at the age of 18, thrown out of the family home by her tyrannical father, she gets married. This marriage lasts only for five years; after the death of her husband, Jameela is compelled to begin sex work in order to find Rs. 5 a day demanded by her mother-in-law as remuneration to look after her children.

The sparks of resistance could be seen in Nalini Jameela right from childhood. She rather uses the weapon of the dispossessed. Rather than outright
agitation and revolutionary stance she resorts to every day forms of resistance. Her desire to go to school is thwarted right from the beginning. The sight of the school, however, raises in her a sense of loss as well as anger and resentment against the forces of oppression. Her strategy to vent out the bottled up emotions of loss and anger is to resort to a public expression of emotions:

But when the school emerged in sight, I’d breakdown. I would howl and bawl and make a big commotion. Not able to express the pain of not being able to go to school, I would put both my hands on my head and howl. People would gather and ask with concern whether I had lost my money or something. No, I’d sat between fresh floods of tears, I haven’t lost any money; it’s just that I feel terrible about not going to school. They would try to console me. ..I would keep on repeating that I wanted to study, that I wanted to read English. And then after a while I’d stop crying, go to the shop, buy whatever I needed and go back home. This would happen all over again the next day. I found the wayfarer’s attention very comforting! Whenever I went to the shop, I would cry on the way. (3)

These embers of resistance grew to become a huge fire of reactionary pose as is evident in her autobiography. The crying, complaining girl seeking the comfort of the wayfarers has given way to a strong and determined woman capable of demanding and commanding a space of her own. She refuses to bow down before the powers of patriarchy and the morally taut elite society. She demands respect as a labouring woman.
Nalini Jameela is the eldest girl child of a poor family. Her father, a retired military person of low rank, known publicly as a true communist, was a despot in the domestic circle. He was patriarchal to the core and treated his wife and children like slaves. The first lessons in hypocrisy are being exhibited to the young Nalini by her father. The caste and class equality he preached outside was not relevant inside the walls of the house. Casteism as a prevalent force hindering relationships in Kerala society is evident in Nalini’s father’s attitude to Dalits and Christians. The hypocrisy of the average Keralite is exposed in Nalini’s description of how her father prohibited her from playing with the Dalit girls:

Father would not permit me to mingle with girls. Our neighbours were Dalits and Christians. Father’s official line was that religion was unnecessary, he was not just a Communist but also a follower of Sree Narayan Guru. Yet he would not allow us to mingle with people of other castes. (6)

He also becomes an icon of patriarchal power which relegates women to the margin. Nalini’s mother led an absent presence, only lurking in the background, the sound of her sobs and the intensity of her tears somewhere lost amidst the domineering presence of her husband and Sister-in-law. The principle of untouchability as a pervading presence in the Malayali community is evident in various platforms of life as is shown by Jameela’s experience at the clay mine.
Until Kunhikkavu, a woman belonging to higher castes of society came, Jameela and friends were treated as the heroines enjoying special privileges:

Until she came, my friends and I used to get our tea before everyone else. This changed, and so did some other daily practices. Don’t touch the pitcher with your lips while drinking water, they’d say, Kunhikkavu has to drink from the same vessel! (13).

The combination of classism and casteism is a lethal combination for a woman, especially so in the case of a subaltern woman.

Nalini is critical of the prejudices based on caste and class that are so prevalent in Kerala society. The moral hollowness coloured by caste consciousness is a mark of Malayali society. She finds it pathetically ironic that men like Koyakka and Velayudhan wanted her, a Muslim, but they could not even think of caring for a Muslim child. Women are also no different when it comes to prejudices and certain prevalent evil trends in society. Nalini says:

I too have learnt from experience that the practice of the kind of untouchability which stems from certain prejudices is widely prevalent, and that in this, there’s little difference between activists or ordinary people. It’s women who strut around, thinking of themselves as progressive who often behave the worst. (79)
Nalini also cites the incident of how the police arrested 26 sex workers in Thrissur, an act of atrocity provoked by the simple reason that a sex worker dared to stand near the magistrate’s wife in the KSRTC bus stand. Sympathy and empathy often become shallow facades. Appearances become mere pretensions.

Nalini’s fair skin and good looks added to her misery, especially when she started to work in the quarries to earn money to meet the growing needs of the family. The objectification of the body and the body as a platform to inscribe equations of power and hegemony becomes evident to her. The body becomes an object of gaze reducing the whole self of the person to the materiality and sexual allure of one’s body. Sexual harassment and abuse is so much a part of a poor woman’s life that even the flight to escape from sexual innuendos unharmed seems a victory: “There was tension in that flight; and also a strange thrill. As if each day some victory was renewed in life; as if it were an achievement, valiant and glorious” (8). The attempt to evade sexual abuse itself is a form of resistance.

The degradation of the society which treat women as objects of sexual satiation claims attention. The ironical fact is that it is always the woman who is blamed, it is she who is always the culprit. This is what happens in Nalini’s experience with Ittamash, her first encounter of sexual harassment. When she decides to leave the house, the victim is construed to be the perpetrator, the woman is always found at fault: “Everyone said that it was a terrible mistake to have gone alone into Ittamash’s room. All of a sudden, I was at fault.
I myself began to feel that I had done something wrong” (12). The society including women excels in weaving a sense of guilt and shame to female subjectivity.

The humiliations she and her mother had to suffer from her father and dire poverty provoked in her a rebellious attitude to the existing societal norms. The society as such imbued with the coordinates of power and domination chooses to exploit the poor and helpless. They are driven to further margins of marginalization and inhuman existence. Her elder brother was expelled from the house because he revolted against the father and married out of caste. When Nalini realized that her father’s only intention was to endanger her life, she decided to marry an undesirable man, in order to escape from her father’s tyranny. Soon she realized her mistake, since her husband, Subramanian, was no better than her father. What she earned from the men of her life is exploitation and oppression in multitudinous veiled manifestations..

After her husband’s death neither her family nor his were willing to accept her. She was thrust into a void, left in a vacuum with nobody to qualify her as their own. From there starts a struggle to earn a living, to attain a semblance of independence. The path she chooses might not be justified from a morally indoctrinated, patriarchally conditioned point of view. But the very fact that she dares to own up to the profession she has chosen and articulate the life experiences of many like her itself is an act of resistance. The circumstances that drove her to sex work poses challenges to the moral consciousness and humanitarian ethos of the so called elite society.
The future of her two children, at least a place for them to stay, was her greatest worry, especially because one was a girl. Her mother-in-law agreed to look after them for five rupees a day, at a time when the maximum wage a woman could earn was 4.50 rupees. In desperation, Nalini was lured into the sex trade. Since that time, life has been different for her. Twice she tried to normalize her life by getting married again (even changing her religion and adopting the name Jameela for one marriage), but in both cases she was cheated. Ill health makes her lead a wandering life, seeking refuge variedly in relatives’ houses who condescendingly accept her and her daughter for the first few days and throw her out in the following weeks, in a mosque along with other beggars and so on.

Life teaches its ironical and hard lessons to her. The chasm between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the subjugated, the haves and the have nots prompts her to perceive life in a new light. The coordinates of her perceptions change, the filters of her consciousness recognize the play of power and pelf, of authority and ideology circumscribing the life of the poor.

The emptiness and the devious undercurrents of the institutions and structures of society are brought forward in her autobiography. She questions the foundations and value systems of the institutions so arrogantly formed to maintain law and order, to establish the right and banish the wrong, to protect and to care: “My tactic those days was to keep the policemen in good humour by entertaining them as clients” (22). The guardians themselves become the
most hypocritical abusers. Nalini Jameela’s first “client” was a police officer, a man in the gold-bordered dhoti. She recalls her paradoxical experience:

His behavior towards me that night was very tender. It lasted just one night. But my memories of him are warmer than my memories of Subbarettan. This was the person I’d dreamt of, the lover who appeared in my fantasies.

The same handsome man handed me over to the police in the morning. Men can be both tender and cruel at the same time. I learned that lesson from my very first client. (21)

The double face of man, one who puts on the veil of care and concern only to dishonour and disgrace the woman is touchingly portrayed here. The institutions safeguarding the moral and ethical codes of society crumble down as Jameela screams in the police station: “Police to sleep with by night; police to give thrashing by day!” (21). The protectors turn to be the exploiters and the ironic tragedy of the situation is that those very exploiters persecute the exploited for offense of morality!

The patriarchally conditioned, ideologically manipulated society exhibits double standards. The man who is a partner in sex work is left unhurt, free of all guilt and shame and the woman involved is the one who should
shoulder the whole responsibility of ignominy. Nalini Jameela raises her voice against this duplicitous stance of the mainstream society:

How are we offenders? In what sense? If sex is the offence then there’s one more person who must be punished. How come that fellow is never punished? Isn’t he an offender too?

... We aren’t the only people to commit this crime. There are lawyers who come to us; there are doctors and business men. It isn’t fair that all of them are considered to be respectable and we alone are made into criminals. (69)

The same machinations of double standards are manifested in assigning identity to a woman who walks out of marriage: “The woman who leaves her marriage is stigmatized as a “man-eater,” someone on the prowl for men all the time” (94). The subaltern woman is “positioned on the boundary between human and animal” (Ashcroft, 1995: 39). But the man who leaves the woman is still respectable and holy, with the weight of blame invariably resting on the woman.

The false sense of dignity and hypocritical mindset of her male counterparts reciprocate the attitude of the mainstream society, including those who pose as well wishers:

Those days, clients used to be very much like husbands. We couldn’t ask them anything about themselves; but they wanted to know everything single about us. And when they deigned to tell
us something about themselves, it would be with a holier-than-
thou attitude. (32)

Nalini points out that “Even if you’ve been with such men a thousand times, there’s no change in their attitude: ‘I’m a respectable individual; you are a whore’” (131). The sex workers are considered to be the Others, reinforcing the sense of superiority of the mainstream society. Since they exist as the Others, the mainstream society, laden with the factors responsible for their struggle and subjugation, complacently bathe in the feeling of leading a better life, conforming to moral norms and guising as responsible citizens. The double existence of the male counterparts is taken for granted. Nobody questions them and they live a deceitfully ideal life in society.

The cultural construction of sex workers in the social consciousness of mainstream society is such that they are always coupled with treachery, theft, obnoxious behaviour, abusive language and so on. She becomes attuned with the negatives, the second terms in the hierarchically conditioned binary opposites of good/bad, civilized/savage, cultured/uncultured, beautiful/ugly and so on. This attitude finds its strongest exponents not in the men folk of society but in the community of women. Nalini remembers an instance where a woman from the NGO SEWA found her purse missing and without even a second thought decides that the sex workers present had stolen her purse. She also narrates another incident where she was abused by a group of women:

They began to shower abuse at me— it was because of women like me, apparently, that the country was going to the dogs. I wanted
to tell them, it isn’t we who’re making a botch of this place; it’s the men in your country who’re experts at that kind of job! (72)

There is an inherent dichotomy between women in prostitution and married or single women. There is an intrinsic belief among normal mainstream women that sex workers are responsible for the dysfunction or destruction of their marital framework. And the pathetic fact is that they find it easier and convenient to entrust the whole burden of shame and responsibility on the sex worker’s shoulders. The man, who is as equal a partner in crime as the sex worker, is left unscathed. He in turn turns back and hurls stones at her.

The processes of normalizing and naturalizing domination is active even today and wherever it is recognized as such it is met with acts of resistance, sometimes futile and sometimes not. It is, as Adolph Reed Jr. observes: “Sure there is infrapolitics – there always is, and there always will be; whenever there’s oppression, there’s resistance. That’s one of the oldest slogans of the left. But it is also a simple fact of life”( Duncombe,2002: 99). Oppression and resistance go together. Politics is the invisible chord between them.

Nalini Jameela is not the kind of woman who would wed silence and helplessness as her lot and cringe and crawl in desperation. She dares to resist the forces of oppression and stereotyping that cast sex workers as perpetual threats to society’s normalcy. She becomes an active member of “Jwalamukhi,” an organization which caters to the rights and protection of sex workers. Becoming a Jwalamukhi inaugurates another phase of her eventful life, a phase characterized by outright resistance, protests, marches and public speeches.
The anonymous community of sex workers shackled under the moral and ethical measures of society and reduced to non-existence is given a new voice and face through Jwalamukhi and its members.

Finally attaining some stability, she viewed the sex trade in a different orientation. The bitterness of the double standards of society, the pungent hypocrisy that so rules the elite community, the exploitation, the cruelty, the stigmatization that relegates the sex worker to a shameful existence prompts Nalini Jameela to resist stereotyping and raise her voice for the cause of sex workers. Her autobiographical narration is an account of a perilous life, haunted by humiliation and suffering, both physical and mental. The atrocities she and her friends had to encounter from individuals and institutions prompted her to become involved with the rehabilitation of sex workers and to denounce the hypocrisy she encountered.

Whenever the subaltern woman dares to speak out, to articulate her anger and protest, she is not even accorded the agency to speak. When Nalini dared to speak out in public regarding the problems of sex workers in a touching and effective manner, the immediate response was to deny her the agency. She was treated just as a puppet functioning as a mouthpiece for the men involved, in this case Maithreyan or Paulson:

When I said that I was a sex worker, they said, oh, then Maitreyan must have taught you to speak; Paulson must have coached you well, they are making you say many things. Even if
I made the speech, people assumed I was repeating the words of Mathreyan or Paulson. (72)

The subaltern woman, especially the sex worker, is not expected to speak. In this regard Geetanjali Gangoli also observes: “These stands infantilize women in prostitution; women are denied agency, and are seen as undifferentiated and permanent victims” (2008: 28). Speaking and articulating require a sense of self and identity, the very factors deemed absent as far as sex workers are concerned. They are denied a subject position to speak for themselves.

The various institutions of society only cater to perpetuate the hegemonic equations of the dominant class. The institutions of media and police turn a deaf ear to the problems of the sex workers. Even the murder of a sex worker is treated with complete neglect and disregard. The sex worker is not even accorded the basic dignity and right due to a human being. Her life is of absolutely no importance to anybody. She is forced to lead a shameful presence and is left to die an anonymous death. The murder of a sex worker is a case in point. Nalini Jameela decries the police for fabricating the sex worker’s murder as a normal accident and the media for not taking up the issue earnestly. These institutions of patriarchal supremacy and ideological insinuations treat the sex worker’s life as insignificant, requiring no interrogation of truth or reality:

The police’s version of her death claimed she was run over by a train while trying to escape from them. That’s a bloody lie... It’s mysterious that even with all this evidence, the police insisted
that she was running from them. But of course, it’s well known that the police don’t usually own up so fast when such things happen.

The newspapers weren’t interested in following up the investigation.

Nothing happened, since the dead person was a sex worker. (78)

Professional ethics and the true responsibility of these societal systems become a mere sham and they only aid in reinforcing the subjugation and marginalization of oppressed groups.

The innate hollowness and weakness of the redemptive measure of society like rehabilitation is exposed by Nalini Jameela. She absolutely rejects the notion of rehabilitation for it will only fortify the wretched predicament of the sex workers:

This is just what’s going to happen in this effort to resettle sex workers. They’ll be dragged off to some area like this and put on the dole. Like they did to the beggars. Build a shed for men, women and kids . . . Caged up in a dog’s house; that’s what I call this rounding up of people all inflicted with various scourges! (96)
Rehabilitation becomes another ideologically laden axiom for perpetuating patriarchal and cultural hegemony. She encounters such forces boldly:

I want to ask these people whether they have ever tried to find out about sex workers’ family ties, social ties. Is it possible to build afresh their domestic ties and social ties through rehabilitation? Won’t this merely leave the sex worker all the more isolated and helpless? (111)

Steps like rehabilitation often become the expressions of the condescending benevolence of the elite community. Nalini Jameela’s critique of the condescending measures of the mainstream society reinforces what C.K Janu feels about the steps to rehabilitate the tribals. In this context, Anagha Tambe points out: “These programmes are seen as patronizing and moralizing to women in prostitution, silencing their voices and their concerns” (2008:79). They do not offer the security and dignity that the marginalized crave for. On the contrary, they only aid in furthering the equations of power and dominance, superiority and inferiority. Feminists have always emphasized the importance of consciousness raising. Rather than accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant culture about one's own inferiority, one transforms one's own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising. For example, in their germinal statement of Black feminist identity politics, the Combahee River Collective argued:

... as children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated different — for example, when we were told
in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being ‘ladylike’ and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. In the process of consciousness-raising, actually life-sharing, we began to recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression. (1982: 14-15)

Identity politics is a means of constructing a counter politics of resistance based on the commonality of sufferings shared. What Nalini Jameela and others at “Jwalamukhi” do is a process of consciousness-raising. The primary indicator of self-respect is the ability to assess the truth of their life and to free oneself from the burden of guilt and shame.

The community of women sharing more or less the same sufferings and throngs of oppression can offer material and emotional comfort to each other. Jameela advocates this kind of a kinship between sex workers. This is what the organisation Jwalamukhi also dreams to achieve. Nalini proposes a situation where one sex worker should come to the help of the other sex worker especially in situations of police arrests and bails: “I said this is what our organisation should mainly do: If you get caught, I must come to your aid. If I’m trapped you must help me out“ (68). One way to subvert mainstream intervention seeking to obliterate the sex worker’s right to basic conditions of life is to forge a strong sense of solidarity among them.

The cunning ingenuity of the system is such that it inscribes attitudes of subalternity and marginality into the feminine psyche. The feeling that the sex
workers are committing offences and need to be punished is so deeply inscribed in their own psyche making it their normal, natural burden. It is against these culturally conditioned images that Jameela revolts. She refuses to play along with the tunes of mainstream society. She resists the identities assigned to the sex workers by the so called morally upright civilised society. She calls for a change in the attitude of the sex workers: “If you think it’s an offence, you’re sure to be punished... It’s this attitude that prevents us from finding a solution”(68). Just as the hidden ideological apparatuses of the mainstream society ensures the bent backs of the tribals with inscriptions of fear and inferiority firmly entrenched in their psyche, the civilised society leaves the inner consciousness of the sex worker with indelible imprints of guilt and sin.

Cultural Studies sees identity politics as the new mode of resistance offered by the marginalized who are under the constant threat of stereotyping and subservience. What is crucial about the “identity” of identity politics is the experience of the subject, especially his or her experiences of oppression and the possibility of a shared and more authentic alternative. Identity politics rests on unifying claims about the meaning of politically laden experiences to diverse individuals. It opposes the systematic mystification of the experiences of the oppressed by the perspective of the dominant. Identity politics shares the anti-liberal view that individuals' perceptions of their own interests may be systematically distorted by ideology and must be somehow freed of their misperceptions by group-based transformation. It is these positive emancipatory stances of identity politics that Nalini Jameela and the members of ‘Jwalamukhi’ venture to perform.
The marginalised communities see difference as an indicator of power and freedom rather than as versions of inferiority: “I think that femininity is a woman’s strength. There is not much advantage in aping men” (109). Jameela in a master stroke portrays the differences of the life of the sex workers from the domestic, home-centred ideal of women to the advantage of the former:

I put forward some other views, trying to argue that sex workers were different from other women. . . we are free in four respects. We don’t have to cook and wait for a husband; we don’t have to wash his dirty clothes; we don’t have to ask for our husbands’ permission to raise our kids as we deem fit, and we don’t have to run after our husbands claiming rights to their property to raise our kids. (85)

Nalini Jameela refuses to be limited or circumscribed by her experience of being a sex worker. She dares to voice her difference as her strength and urges her co-workers to amass power and might to convert their difference to forces of strength and resistance.

Nalini became a strong advocate of the rights of sex workers, and participated in a meeting in Thailand of sex workers from Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal and India where a video camera was presented to the participants to make films based on their actual experiences. But her efforts to organize and fight for the human rights of sex workers and her ability to make films were questioned even by feminists. In her autobiographical narration she writes candidly about her bitter experiences at that time, and efforts to position
herself as a subject expressing her own convictions. This assertion was too much to accept in a pretentious milieu where there is no red light district, but plenty of cases of rape and atrocities involving big shots in society. This act of speaking out rejects the notion of sex worker as an object in market place and through the act of narration Nalini Jameela demands both a voice and identity.

The complexities of the real world are bereft of a unitary governing ideal. Patriarchy is not the only oppressing ideology for sex workers. It intersects and overlaps with several other cultural and social imperatives. The sex workers were/are hated and derided by society: “We were always cast out from society” (125). They are positioned at the most extremes of marginality and they become Other even to the “Others.” Her status is far inferior to even that of the tribals or the Dalits: “The rich and the poor are equally unsympathetic to us” (123). The term “subaltern” brings the complicated web of power play to the periphery whereas the term “prostitute” instantly pulls forward overt or covert expressions of sin, hatred, immorality, indictment, degeneration and degrading corruption. She is not even allowed to share a common platform with the tribals. She is not allowed even to rent a space near the Dalits. Jameela’s recounting of her experience of being rejected at a convention of tribals is not only pathetic but also cruel:

When the police fired on the tribals at Muthanga, a large convention was held in protest at Manantavadi, and I also took part in it. I went there because I was invited. When I was called to speak, a young girl came up to the mike and announced loudly
that Janu and a sex worker were not to be treated alike. It was clear that someone had made her do that. This experience was a good eye-opener with regard to the prejudices that even highly motivated political activists lug around. (122)

The incident divulges the extent and viciousness of the marginal position that the sex workers inhabit. Nalini also mentions how the Dalits forced the sex workers to vacate a rented home near a Dalit colony: “Apparently the fear that the dark-skinned women of that area would all be mistaken for sex workers, and so we were asked to shift to a better locality” (123). Irrespective of class, race or gender, people have the same attitude to sex workers: “The argument that the poor would understand us better than the rich didn’t seem to hold much steam” (123). It is worthwhile to mention Meena Saraswathi Seshu’s observation:

> Being in prostitution, women get cornered into a caste-class of their own. This caste-class occupies the lowest rung in the hierarchy and is structured ‘outside’ the hierarchy. Mobility is almost impossible. (2008: 197)

The sex worker occupies an isolated space literally and metaphorically and her isolation is not only from mainstream society but also from the marginalized communities. They are twice or thrice removed from the centre.

Language is often seen as the weapon of the powerful. But language sometimes acts as the most powerful weapon that the weakest and the
subjugated own. Language is the bludgeon with which the sex workers fight against harassment and protect themselves:

It’s the women who rest in the streets after begging for alms and workers who are liberal in their use of crude language for the sake of security when lying in the streets, if the fellow who’s harassing you has a shred of decency left, he’ll withdraw quickly when his father and mother are showered with choicest abuse . . . Pungent tongues are also the sole defensive weapon that married couple from Tamil Nadu who come here seeking work, have. They are still very much used precisely because they effectively repel any assailant who has some sense of honour left in him. (121)

The use of language is political here for it encodes the ideology of the dispossessed. Language is moulded to be a tool of resistance and defense.

Nalini Jameela occupies a unique subject position. She thwarts her affinity with feminists and even resists their attempts to categorize and theorize her. She defies being defined. She refuses to be classified. Her subject position, being the most subaltern and laden with the blame of polluting sin, is beyond the theoretical coordinates of feminism. She exposes the inability of the
feminists, mostly populated by middle class intellectuals, to identify with the cause of sex workers:

... in general feminists are reluctant to accept sex workers. I think that’s because they cannot see that sex is a woman’s need as well, when I became active in organizational work, many asked me whether sex wasn’t man’s need, and whether fulfilling it was being true to feminism, I don’t think this is true; sex is not just a man’s need. Feminists aren’t very different from ordinary women; that’s why they ask this. (111)

The polluted body of the sex worker remains outside the feminist space. Shanon Bell suggests, within the feminist’s analyses “there is no space for the prostitute herself, particularly if her speech may contradict the feminist construction of her body” (1994: 73). The feminists’ attempt to sympathise and commiserate with the sex workers often become a mere charade.

Nalini Jameela resists the powers of oppression which seek to relegate sex workers to a no-rights zone and boldly claims their right to demand rights. The conference organized by “Jwalamukhi” put forth many demands like a minimum wage of a hundred rupees for sex workers, concessions for building houses, ration cards, free medical facilities and so on. Her autobiography in fact puts forward certain revolutionary ideas. She demands sex work to be decriminalized. She demands sex work to be treated as a profession, just like music and teaching, for which remuneration is offered and taken: “All that needs to be ensured is that no rules are imposed on those who are prepared to
sell or buy sex” (114). She refuses the social system which is bend on circumscribing the sex workers within the framework of rules and laws. Jameela envisages the need for sharing a strong political space of solidarity.

Nalini Jameela defies the usual contours expected out of a sex worker. She dares to speak out the needs of the sex workers in front of the public rather eloquently. She is the one who initiates slogans in a protest march. She presents a paper on “The Social Position of the Devadasis” during a symposium on the topic “HIV and the Role of Men.” The organisation was able to gain national attention. Her attempt is to bring before public consciousness the hitherto unrepresented or misrepresented sex worker, her problems and needs. Her courage, her resilience and her strong determination as exemplified in her autobiography as well as her activist life needs to be lauded. Her journey has been a long and strenuous one meandering through the paths of life, adorning a multiplicity of faces in the various phases of her life. From being a clay mine worker to that of a sex-worker with interim facets of a business woman, she has come a long way to become a documentary director, activist and a writer. The interesting fact is that in none of these stages she denounces sex work: “... when I appeared on Asianet News Hour, there was the question about what I was doing to end sex work. I replied that my desire was to maintain it” (109).

She is not ashamed of sex work and even gives it the status of a therapeutic act. In this context, Geetanjali Gangoli states:

As with other marginalized groups such as homo-sexual and blacks taking on negatively charged epitaphs, the act of stating
their identity as sex workers is an articulation of their assertion to be recognized as sex workers. (2008: 34)

Jameela simply refuses to surrender to the rigid ideological apparatus and power coordinates of mainstream society. She questions the cultural significations of present day society that attempts a homogenizing act of relegating the sex workers to the margins of margins, doomed to lead a shameful and hated existence. She qualifies the sex workers’ struggle as “the struggle for survival” (89).

Nalini Jameela’s subjectivity is imbued with complex textures of power, for her Otherness is not only in relation to man but also in relation to the notion of ideal womanhood. Existence of categories like the sex workers is in a way desired by the so called community of common women, for that ensures the perpetuation of the laden notion of ideal femininity. As long as “Others” like Jameela are there, the so called “woman,” the domestic ideal, the society lady, the elite feel complacent and relieved. The sex workers do not share the same concerns and causes as the common women. Theirs is a different horizon, coloured with radically varied shades and hues. Their fight is not only against patriarchy and cultural subordination or psychological enslavement, but theirs is an attempt to forge an identity of their own, erasing the stigmatizing labels endorsed on them, subverting the very platform that defines them. Hers is a reverse discourse as Shannon Bell observes: “These discourses are reverse discourses, that is, they counter hegemonic discourses on prostitution” (1995:100). Jameela argues for the status of a worker, a labouring
subaltern and that of a knowledgeable expert and she refuses to be treated as the devilish, demoniac temptress out to jeopardize morality.

Jameela’s autobiography is a valiant effort at challenging the prostitute stereotype. It rejects the dominant womanhood not only by articulating the hitherto untold story of the marginalized labouring woman-subject but also by not seeking to be defined within the home-centred category of women. She provokes the civilized consciousness by refusing to bow down in shame and sin as a sex worker and by demanding to be treated as a labourer with the potential even for a sex therapy. Sexuality is a cultural construct that contributes to the construction of cultural identity. Commodification of sexuality is rather an extended version of cultural commodification. Texts like Jameela’s, which offer strong voices of resistance, are specimens of cultural resistance. They resist commodification of women as sexual objects on the one hand and man’s attempt at constructing and controlling female sexuality on the other: “Struggling to hold my ground, fighting inch by inch, I realized that life is a great struggle: in order to live, one must fight, fight incessantly” (17). It is this strong sense of resistance, the courage and resilience to fight and thus carve a new subject position of her own that is embodied in the text The Autobiography of a Sex Worker.

Nalini Jameela represents those women in prostitution who are survivors with the sharpest insights - be it on the double standards of society, the violent intricate underpinnings of trafficking networks that are brutalizing prostitution, even the hollowness of state-sponsored rights, which strengthen the violators more than the violated, or the complicated cultural stipulations that relegate the
sex worker to a non-existent fluidity. Though *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* is imbued with certain inherent contradictions and sometimes poses more questions than answers, the author’s insights which best define the contours of a right discourse, will help resist the violence in their lives, marginalized by the hypocrisies of the “system.” Her work reminds her community that like all survivors they have the courage and strength to create a world that has much to offer. A world, touched not only by their pain but also by their dream for a society comprising of people who will affirm their “right” to self worth, dignity and livelihood that no agency can either give or deny.

Both the texts, C.K Janu’s *Mother Forest* and Nalini Jameela’s *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, presented as an extended conversations with editors, convey their lack of compromise in their assertions. They are not positioned as cultural icons, but as ordinary individuals with strong communal feelings. In both cases the narrator’s self is relegated to the margins of society. But they boldly resist taken for granted attitudes towards the neglected segments of the population and speak for them. Focusing on personal experiences of multiple intersecting oppressions, the texts with gaps and fissures take their contours from multiple spaces of adjacency. The narrators’ positions are different from the usual determined places of power or margins of meaning, questioning established geographies of knowledge. They challenge the existing sanctioned and legitimated cultural performance of identity. Through such narrative interventions, these women contest oppressive identity performances and highlight the temporalities and spatialities of marginalized identities. They try to bring an anonymous collectivity to the front of the stage,
with great courage, no longer assuming the role assigned to them but asserting their own right to a voice and a part in the action. The texts attempt to represent a community or communities that have always been outside the textual spaces of culture and history. They deviate from fixed object positions which are culturally intelligible, purposefully locating themselves as subjects.

The autobiographical narratives, *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, foreground the relationship of subjectivity to power. Self-narration is an act that prevents amnesia as well as a resistance to the practice of imposing identities on previously voiceless, marginalized groups. The attempt of these marginalized women is a humble attempt to evolve a subaltern essence. The very fact that Janu and Jameela understand the oppressive forces in action so clearly and dare to articulate them boldly is a strong act of resistance. The first step of resistance is acknowledging oppression and articulating it. This is what Janu and Jameela achieve through their oral autobiography. The transparent and explicit proclamation of anger and protest against forces that tend to suppress and exploit the subaltern, be it the tribals or the sex workers, gives the texts a rare charm. Their resistance is directed at all the forces of the outside world, be it the civil society, migrants, market forces, *jenmis*, police, media, sex trafficking rackets, the so called elite women, the fake sympathizers or government at large, who try to obliterate the very essence of subaltern existence in one way or other. Resistance gives voice to the voiceless, space to the excluded and attention to
the exploited (Rose, 2008: 96). Resistance is indeed, “the brake to the exploiters’ juggernaut” and it is “the life line of the subalterns” (Rose, 2008: 102). For the sincerity of the emotions expressed, for the fire of anger and protest that inhabit the texts, for the spirit of boldness and courage that reverberates in them, for the sheer nerve to articulate and give voice to the devoiced communities *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are resistance texts.