Chapter Three

Subdued Voices

Literary works are considered in general “cultural products and regarded as symptoms of specific cultural forces” (Sardar and Loon 147). As such literature faithfully reflects the society from which it takes its origin and the writers are induced to address the major issues of their time. The chief concern of the postcolonial literature is to challenge the existing practices that are unfair and discriminatory. This postcolonial concept has resulted in the emergence of Subaltern Studies which pounce on marginalization of all kinds.

Ashcroft et al. define marginality as, “the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged center” (102) and “embracing marginality involves resisting domination and dismantling the oppressive discourses of power” (Prasad 157). The term subaltern is borrowed from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci who used the term to refer to a proletariat. Spivak adopted it as it is a ‘flexible’ term that can include all who suffers. “In a word, subaltern refers to the oppressed and the marginalized group of people” (Ashcroft 158). As Ghotra argues “this term refers to such groups or individuals as are discriminated against, marginalized, subordinated, and / or oppressed because of their supposedly inferior class, caste, gender, race, language and culture” (244).
Subalternity is a state of existence that can be witnessed in every society. Till recently what Spivak professed that, “the subaltern has no history and can not speak” (28) was true. However, when the discrimination imposed on a particular subject becomes unbearable, there comes a necessity to address them. This paved the way for Subaltern Literature which set out to disprove Spivak’s view. It is a branch of Postcolonial Literature which deals at large with the centre-margin paradigm. The literary works that come under Subaltern Literature uphold the problems of the oppressed and the cultural divergence prevalent in India. “Such narratives revolve around the basic issues of dissonance and identity and problematise the implications of re-presenting the subaltern. Representations are today a topic of great significance … in the larger cultural milieu” (Jamuna 120).

The authors chosen for the study namely Roy, Hariharan and Desai living in or having lived in different parts of India are quite aware of the discriminating pulls of the country which hinder the progress and growth of a developing country like India and register them faithfully in their fictional narratives. They also highlight commendably how such discriminations have a strong cultural endorsement. Roy, Hariharan and Desai affirm that in India, a tendency to marginalize the weak in the name of class, community, religion, race or physical deformity is widely seen. They invariably disclose how these discriminating forces trounce the spirit
of the weaker section of the society and thus become obstacles to progress. Hence, they faithfully register them in their novels, thereby attempting to instil awareness in the society.

Roy being a social activist is sensitive to the problems of the subaltern groups and expresses her resentment against all kinds of marginalization in strong terms. She has remonstrated against repression imposed on the minority of her country by writing highly inciting and blistering essays on the various social issues. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* is a collection of such essays proclaims the writer’s social concern and her daring spirit to give expression to the angst of the socially and politically marginalised inhabitants of not only India, but rather the entire globe and it marks her unique among other writers. Her “*The God of Small Things* is a forceful literary protest against all types of marginalization, subordination or oppression of the subalterns by their domineering counterparts” (Ghotra 244) which are rampant in her native state Kerala. The crux of her writing as she herself reiterates in several of her interviews is “the conflict between power and powerlessness…” (qtd. in Prasad 158).

Githa Hariharan presents the causes of discrimination and its various types existing in Tamil Nadu. Being born in a Brahmin family, most of her problems are addressed from this communal background. Brahmins are seen as instruments in instilling hegemony in the Indian society, owing to
their superior birth and Hariharan expresses her resentment in her novels. In addition, she also presents other means of subjugation inflicted on individuals and condemns them and thus depicts her interest in advocating communal harmony.

Kiran Desai on the other hand narrates the various types of marginalization prevailing in North India and her expatriate living has proven a blessing in giving a photographic picture of the discrimination endured by her countrymen in the West. Her chief concern as a writer is a dichotomy that exists between diverse races both within and outside the country in this globalized era.

One of the obvious reasons for the discrimination is a few sets of people’s attitude to their culture and heritage. They do not realize the value of their culture and get engrossed by alien culture and glorify them and as such “Western culture has a detrimental effect on Third World societies” (Sardar and Loon 169). The postcolonial India is still under imperial influence and as a result, “the post colonial writer had been confronted with neo-colonial society engulfed by a socio-cultural hegemony” (Jamuna 188).

The blind attraction for the colonizer still exists in the colonized country like India has been presented by Roy in *The God of Small Things*. She “comments on the colonization of the mind which many Indians suffer from” (Nandy 79). In India there are people who glorify anything that is
English, as they believe their master’s language and culture are superior to their native culture. Roy explains this attitude through the characters Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Chacko, and their adoration and effort to imitate the habits of their colonizer. Roy very humorously portrays how the children are forced to talk and write English, taught only English songs and taken only to English movies. Though they live in a village in Kerala, they behave as if they are English people and think they are superior. The fact is that their vanity results in the loss of their identity and they are not at all considered either as Indian or as English.

Chacko is an anglophile who hurts his mother for showing love and care like a typical Indian mother. At the same time, he adores his English wife just because she is independent and uncaring. In spite of the fact that Margaret Kochamma, his English wife has forsaken him and preferred another man, Chacko admires her for choosing an Englishman and Roy comments that anybody “could see that Chacko was a proud and happy man to have had a wife like Margaret. White” (GST 143). As a typical male chauvinist, Chacko enjoys all the care that is devoted to him by his mother, but he displays different attitude towards his wife just because she is English. He even worries his mother by talking very proudly about Margaret. “As though he admired her for having divorced him. She traded me in for a better man he would say to Mammachi…” (249).
Roy meticulously uses her novel as a vehicle to condemn the people whose sojourn in the Western countries make them despise their own country and its people in spite of the subjugation they undergo there. Though they love their parents they have “a lick of shame that their families who had come to meet them were so …. so gawkish”. They find fault with the Indians’ dress and despise the Malayalees thinking “why did Malayalees have such awful teeth” (GST 140). People in general take pride of their ability to talk in English. Roy makes fun of it through her character K.N.M.Pillai. “K.N.M.Pillai said triumphantly ‘she understands English very well. Only doesn’t speak’” (278) about his wife. Thus some people in India adhere to a general tendency to accept anything of their colonizer as great and thereby admit their hegemony and subjugate themselves.

Desai too articulates the Indians’ blind admiration and fascination for the Western countries though they despise the East. The author reveals this through Sampath, the protagonist of *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Sampath sitting in the dirty, hot land dreams “of a village belle from Switzerland in a tight-laced frock and two fat yellow plaits that resembled something good to eat”. He believes that “Switzerland was a cold country where there was not a speck of dirt” (HGO 34). Such beliefs insinuate an average Indian’s admiration for the western countries.

*The Inheritance of Loss* too focuses on the Indian’s blind approbation for the colonizer. It is seen a common trait in every Indian to
gloat over anything that is American. This is communicated through Biju, the son of the cook who with immense pride writes to his father that in New York he is given “Angrezi khana only, no Indian food and the owner is not from India. He is from America itself” (IL 14). The cook also takes delight in this as he “felt sure that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian” (17). He boasts about his son working in “‘New York. Very big city’, he explained. “The cars and building are nothing like here. In that country, there is enough food for everybody” (84). When his friends request the cook to take their sons also there, he very confidently avers, “Yes, yes. I will take us all. Why not? That country has lots of room. It’s this country that is so crowded” (85). The power that these first world countries still wield on the third world countries is brilliantly communicated by Desai: “The man with the white curly wig and a dark face covered in powder, bringing down his hammer, always against the native, in a world that was still colonial” (205).

The judge who despises his parents and his wife for their Indian birth adores every thing English. “He envied the English” (119) and it made him loath his own. He feels that the English is a superior race and always “felt ill at ease in the company of the English” (119). He like Pappachi of The God of Small Things believes that the Englishman is honest and it is because a Scot recommended for the place in Kalimpong that he builds a house Cho Oyu there and lives there like “a foreigner in his
own country, for this time he would not learn the language” (IL 29). Though there are so many versatile Indian personalities who can be taken as one’s role model, the judge goes after the English ones. For him the picture of Queen Victoria is a highly inspiring one: “Each morning as Jemubhai passed under, he found her froggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grow” (58). A similar affinity to the West is expressed by Lola who thinks there is no scope for youngsters in India. She advises her daughter Pixie that, “India is a sinking ship. Don’t want to be pushy, darling, sweetie, thinking of your happiness only but the door won’t stay open forever…” (47). The cook in *The Inheritance of Loss* also expresses his grudge in not getting the privilege to work for an English master. He “had been disappointed to be working for Jemubhai. A severe come-down, he thought, from his father, who had served white men only. The ICS was becoming Indianised and they didn’t like it…” (63).

The Indians take pride in anything that is Western and extend total partisanship to their colonizers whereas the Westerners despise the third world countries like India and their culture. They rejoice in their superior birth and fondly cherish this hegemony all through. Sardar and Loon sum up the attitude of the Westerners as follows: “Non European people were despised as inferior and seen as material ripe for exploitation” (122). The
Western world still treats the East with contempt. Roy provides instances that illustrate the fact admiringly. Chacko and Margaret marry at a church in Oxford and they pose for a photograph. They seem very happy. However, her parents are antagonistic towards their daughter’s choice. Roy accentuates that in the photograph “Margaret Kochamma’s mother was looking away, out of the photograph, as though she would rather not have been there” (GST 240). Her father goes a step further. He does not like to attend the wedding as he “disliked Indians, he thought of them as sly, dishonest people. He couldn’t believe that his daughter was marrying one” (240). Rahel also encounters humiliation in her tint in New York where she has been addressed by the customers of her shop as “Hey, you! Black bitch! (187). These words differentially spit out the umbrage the white has for the Indians.

Desai gives a picture of racial domination that prevailed in New York by symbolically narrating the abode taken by various inhabitants at a hotel: “On top, rich colonial, and below, poor native....” (IL 21). In another hotel the American flag flutter on top, whereas the flags of the third world countries including that of India fly far below. The English believe that the people of the East “were a troublesome pair” and “they might upset the balance, perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below” (23). As Vipin Kumar Singh has rightly averred that moving “between the northeast corner of India and New York, the
novel displays how a person is marginalized and kept in shadow by a privileged class of the society. The othering of person because of his different race and ethnicity is a conscious effort made by white people” (14). Desai too shares a similar view by depicting how Jemubhai, the judge is “cornered and disgusted for his Indian race and ethnicity. His skin colour and regional accent make him strange and disgusting among English people” (V. Singh 14).

Desai makes an attempt to unravel the truth how in India, one’s own countrymen show enthusiasm to discriminate his own race and she criticises this tendency in strong terms. She regretfully presents the impartial attitude of the airport authorities who “are giving compensation to non-resident Indians and foreigners, not to Indian nationals…” (IL 298). This makes the Indians protest: “Treating people from a rich country well and people from a poor country badly. It’s disgrace. Why this lopsided policy against your own people?” (298).

Class also plays a vital role in ascribing a person a sense of dignity and makes him/her suppress others just because they are born in a low class family. As Prakash observes “Class -conflicts in our Indian society are not new, rather they are deeply rooted in our ancient culture and civilization” (201). Mammachi in The God of Small Things is one such character who always takes pride in her high class birth. She strongly believes she is superior to others. If she is invited to a wedding in
Kotayam, she would spend the whole time whispering to whoever she is with that the “bride’s maternal grandfather was my father’s carpenter. Kunjukutty Eapen? His great-grandmother’s sister was just a midwife in Trivandrum. My husband’s family used to own this whole hill” (GST 168). This pride drives her to hate her daughter-in-law just because she is a “shop-keeper’s daughter” (167). Even Kochu Maria, the servant of the Ayemenem house feels exhilarated thinking about her high-class birth. She always wears her kunuku [earrings] because if she does not, “how would people know that despite her lowly cook’s job (seventy rupees a month) she was a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya, Or a Pulaya or a Paravan. But a Touchable upper-caste Christian” (170).

Hegemony is also established in the Indian society by people in terms of muscle strength. The episode in the Abilash Talkies in The God of Small Things illustrates this. Poor Estha is abused by the strong and powerful Orange drink Lemon drink man. He exploits Estha for deriving sexual pleasure. He threatens Estha with his trenchant looks and threatening words and makes him feel helpless. The single incident does unimaginable damage to the boy’s personality.

In one of the interviews with Antonia Navarro and Tejero Hariharan pronounces the hegemonic world view of the present “that mistrusts heterogeneity; that wants to hold back the traditionally voiceless, the women, the marginal castes and classes, the ‘foreigner,’ anyone with a
different face or religion or ideology” (208). She registers the air of supremacy of the caste in which one is born instils in an individual. She also traces the origin of this inequity. It dates back to the age of Manu. He asserted that Brahmans sprang from the head of the God and hence they are to be respected by the rest. Hariharan faithfully records the attitude of the Brahmans as follows: “Baba said, ‘wherever you are, remember you are a Brahmin. You may not know it, but underneath that skin flows a fine-veined river of pure blood, the legacy of centuries of learning’” (TFN 52). These words are sprinkled with the air of supremacy and demand the consideration for Brahmans and their Sanskrit language as “highbrow knowledge” (52). The author shows that it is a common tendency seen widely in the Indian society and has a strong cultural support. Sita, the mother of Devi in The Thousand Faces of Night as well exhibits a similar attitude. If Devi brought any of her friends home, her mother would go around her with a lot of questions about her friends. Devi becomes Hariharan’s voice in expressing her mind and says mordantly, “what she really wanted to ask was, Are they Brahmans? Are their kitchens spotless? And do they belong to our heir-loom-filled, pure-casted aristocracy?” (85).

Hariharan teases the postcolonial Indian belief that oppressing others is the best means of survival through her character Venkatesan, the colleague of the protagonist in The Ghosts of Vasu Master. When Vasu Master shows sympathy towards his students, his colleague Vengatesan
rebukes him by telling him not to be so patient and kind with his boys for he feels that in a “few years they will find out that there is very little kindness or patience in the world outside”, and so the teachers must equip their students to get accustomed to the reality. He continues that it “would be the kindest thing you can do for them” (GVM 207).

The chapter entitled “The Sting in the Scorpion’s Tail” in The Ghosts of Vasu Master reveals how the weaker section of the society is crushed by the dominant evil forces and however, the little fly like Diamond who is marginalized for its unusual colour strives hard to eschew the evil effect of scorpions they could not succeed. Hariharan’s scorpion stands for that part of society that keeps discrimination alive.

Hariharan explicates how cultural institutions like the Manch exploit the beliefs of the common people and establish hegemony is imparted through In Times of Siege. It pounces on the weak and tries to mop them out if they dare to question them or their beliefs. Hariharan implicates this in In Times of Siege. The protagonist Shiv’s history lesson invites agitation from the cultural group who calls themselves Itihas Suraksha Manch, meaning protectors of history. They assail him for undermining Hinduism and reducing its saints as ordinary men and accuse him by calling him a traitor who is loyal to Pakistan and Muslims. It also threatens to harm his wife and daughter who are far away. The letters they have sent proclaim the hegemonic and violent attitude of the members of the Manch who await
the opportunity to marginalize weak persons like Shiv. He feels himself highly vulnerable and tries to take reprieve from this agonizing and dominating world to live temporarily in the calm and comforting world of the children – Babli and Meena. However, he realises that he cannot linger there for long. Hariharan writes: “His brief hour of reprieve, the comforting calm before the storm, spent in secret garden of wise children. Then it all begins again. The world outside the small room stirs, raises its hood” (TS 84). Hariharan also uses this opportunity to strip the selfishness of these people who occupy the centre of the society. They especially the president of the *Itihas Suraksha Manch* utilizes this opportunity to earn fame and he also sows the seeds of violence in the society to oppress the weak and the marginalized. He tries to wake up the Hindus in the name of revival and thus paves way for agitation. Hariharan exploits this incident to assert that in a multicultural country like India how such agitations in the name of religion lead to chaos. She repeatedly takes effort to uphold her view that man is always interested to prey upon his weaker counterpart. While the protagonist Shiv presents himself for panel discussions on his history lesson, he encounters another panelist whom Shiv calls “big wig”. He looks at Shiv very avidly like “a hawk waiting to swoop down on a delectable mouse” (116). Arya, the colleague of Shiv also gloats over the misfortune of Shiv. His “face looks bloated as if he has been feasting on Shiv’s misery…. No wonder Arya was an unexpected accomplice; he
wanted the meeting so he could gloat in public over the Manch’s new victim” (125).

People who consider themselves superior revel over all their attributes and behaviour. They take pride even in the language they speak. Fraudley is one such creation of Hariharan who holds that Sanskrit language is divine. He calls it “not a dead or elitist language. It is the symbol of cultural unity, and the ancient wisdom that helps us read horoscopes. Besides, computer scientists agree that Sanskrit is the ideal language for software” (133).

The Manch agitators not only indulge themselves in violence but also contribute considerably to bring about segregation in the multinational community. They kindle the religious feeling in order to bring chaos in the society. Very cunning questions put forth by them like if “the Muslims can have their fundamentalists why can’t we? Have we forgotten that Hindus have stood the test of time like no one else? Our fundamentalists have been around longer than theirs have. So we have to show the world we are superior to them in every way” (135) impinge on considerably the social harmony of a multicultural and religious country like India where everyone aspires to achieve ascendancy. Hariharan feels that such a state “has to be viewed as part of a larger process to deny the composite nature of Indian culture” (169). Such depictions finger at the unhealthy state of India where there is little hope that exists for the weak and marginalized. How power
has become more or less like a seductive and ultimately results in the erosion of values and human culture is well narrated by the author.

Desai too highlights the centre – margin paradigm prevalent in the Indian society. She attacks the master’s tendency to establish their power over the servants by behaving mercilessly. Desai paints one such master Jemubhai in *The Inheritance of Loss*. He is so oblivious to the problems of the workers. Desai gives illustrations to elucidate the hegemonic and cruel mind of this man. When he is not given cake with tea, he scolds the baker mercilessly for having gone for his daughter’s marriage. He shouts how “dare he go for a wedding. Is that the way to run a business? The fool” (IL 3). Another instance is still more spiteful. The cook who suffers from arthritis is reprimanded for not baking cake. He yells at him: “Why the hell can’t he make it over wood? All these old cooks can make cakes perfectly fine by building coals around in a tin box. You think they used to have gas stoves, kerosene stoves before? Just too lazy now” (3).

The highly authoritative and oppressing educational system in India also becomes a butt of ridicule in the hands of Desai. She portrays how this social institution which disseminates the cultural richness of a country instead of promoting the growth of the younger generations, compete with other cultural and social forces to subjugate the weak. The protagonist Sai is the victim of such a rigid educational system. In the system, the teachers use power to squeeze the spirits of the tender students. Sai who is fed up
with the strict convent education is much relieved when she hears of her expulsion from the school owing to the death of her parents. Though she hears the most unfortunate news of her becoming an orphan, she delights in bidding farewell “to four years of learning the weight of humiliation and fear, the art of subterfuge, of being uncovered by black-habited detectives and trembling before the rule of law that treated ordinary everyday slips and confusions with the seriousness first degree crime” (29), and the beastly punishments given to the kids. Desai also promulgates that the punishment though intended to instil purity, is doing otherwise. Actually, “it excelled in defining the flavour of sin” (29).

Roy, Hariharan and Desai homogeneously highlight how Indian culture promotes the power-play and there exists always the two extreme sides – the weak and the powerful, occupying the periphery and centre respectively. People in India are generally discriminated in the name of caste. Caste is a social evil which is practised even today in India and it has become a part of Indian culture. It is about two thousand years old.

This system which is an integral part of Hinduism, divides the population into four major groups. The Brahmin (priestly caste) at the top, followed by the Kshatriya (warrior caste), then the Vaishya (commoners, usually known as trading and artisan castes), and at the bottom the Sudra (agricultural labourers) some of whom are beyond the pale of caste and
are known as untouchables. The caste system is not only structural, but has a cultural dimension as well. (Khushu and Lahiri 112)

The caste system which was introduced in the Indian society, to carry out the smooth running of its various institutions, slowly lost its motive and used as a force to suppress the weak. This being the cultural practice seen widely in India and it has been transmitted generation after generation, the writers chosen for study Roy, Hariharan and Desai remonstrate against this cultural discrimination. As a responsible social activist, Roy has revealed her strong resentment against this unhealthy custom in *The God of Small Things*. Ghotra rightly observes that the novel “depicts the plight of the caste subalterns in the Malabar region during the various phases of the 20th century in a very telling manner” (246).

Roy registers her strong protest against the society and culture which favours the powerful and harasses the weak under the same circumstances. With scathing cynicism, she describes the two schools in Ayemenem – one for ‘touchables’ and another for the ‘untouchables’. Though Roy pens these words, as if giving details of the protagonist’s village, there is a hidden travesty and derision that one can infer very easily between her lines.

The worst kind of discrimination is inflicted on the Indian humanity in the name of caste. The low caste people do all the menial work to the
high class people. At the same time, they are prevented from entering their houses or touching any of their articles. Roy talks in detail about Paravans, one of the castes considered inferior. The people belonging to this section of the South Indian society “were expected to crawl backwards with a broom sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint” (GST 74). Roy very sarcastically comments that this situation is much better when compared with the time of Mammachi’s childhood. In those days, the low caste people were not even allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies or to carry umbrellas. “They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed” (74).

The low caste people are forbidden to touch the high caste people and their belongings. Roy is of the view that such caste taboos were made “long before Christianity arrived in” (33) Kerala. The fate of the so called untouchables is explained through Velutha. He, as a little boy “held out little gifts he had made for her [Ammu], flat on the palm of his hand, so that she could take without touching him” (GST 175). Velutha, ‘the god of small things’ who trained himself under the German carpenter becomes an excellent carpenter. He has a knack with machines and could repair anything with his limited knowledge. Mammachi avers that “if only he
hadn’t been a Paravan he might have become an engineer” (75). However, she does not like the self-esteem that Velutha displays in all that he does and says. The touchable co-workers also resent Velutha’s talents in carpentry “because according to them Paravans were not meant to be carpenters” (77). Mammachi satisfies them by paying him less than them, though he is much more efficient. “She thought that he should be grateful to her for allowing him to move around the factory premises and also for allowing him to touch things that touchables touched” (Surendran 47). This amply substantiates how the discrimination in the name of one’s caste mashes the talents and the future of untouchables and how they are denied of the privileges enjoyed by the touchable community. Moreover, it also recapitulates the fact that self-respect and confidence which are considered as appreciable qualities for a touchable man are considered insolence for a Paravan. However, they aspire to come up “like their master but that does not annul their age-old Paravan identity, which is the albatross round their untouchable necks” (Naik 226).

Roy belongs to the more uncommon breed of writers. She has a keen interest in the uplift of the hapless underdogs and with utmost commitment presents the struggle for existence in her pages. She has learnt from her society that knowledge to the low caste is considered a sin by the touchable society and it gives one an unsafe edge. She depicts this through the portrayal of Kuttappan, Velutha’s brother who is paralyzed. Roy very
convincingly hints at it by contrasting him with Velutha and comments “Unlike Velutha, Kuttappen was a good, safe Paravan. He could neither read nor write” (GST 207). These words of the author insinuate that education gives an unsafe edge to a low caste.

Though discrimination subsists in the name of gender in a patriarchal society like India, it is discrimination in the name of caste that runs wild in the society. Ammu and Velutha involve in sexual act; but, it is Velutha who is given the worst punishment because he is an outcast “a Paravan”. Mammachi could unflinchingly spit into Velutha’s face and shout “If I found you on my property tomorrow I’ll have castrated like a pariah dog that you are! I’ll have you killed” (284), only because she is a touchable woman and he a mere Paravan who has no hold or sense of belonging in a society where he lives. Even the political party which preaches equality could not be of any help to him. With scathing criticism Roy remarks that it was not entirely his “fault that he lived in a society where man’s death could be more profitable than his life had ever been” (281).

Education gives awareness to the untouchables like Velutha about their legitimate right to live and so when he tries to raise against this societal and political hegemony the policemen whom Roy calls as “history’s henchmen” see to it that such people are safely removed from the society. Roy asserts that “they were not battling an epidemic. They
were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (309). How they squeeze them to death and how these rebels’ lives are ruined are better narrated through the life of Velutha who is ruined beyond redemption by the Kerala police. As Pandit avers,

The policemen are deftly used as tools of the system, a part of the coercive machinery which keeps things in order. Although they are supposed to stand for ‘Politeness, Obedience, Loyalty, Intelligence, Courtesy, Efficiency’ (GST 304), they perform their duties only for those in power. (176)

Thus, “Velutha’s onward march to move to the centre, thus gets completely blocked. For no fault of his, he is rendered a victim to the brutality of ‘touchable’ policemen” (Venugopalan 69). Roy presents a very touching picture of Velutha who is crushed down by the police only due to his low status in society. She lists out how the inhuman brutality of the police tear apart the body of Velutha:

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheek bones were smashed…. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung which was what made him bleed from his mouth… His spine was damaged in two places…. Both his knee caps were shattered. Still they brought out the handcuffs. (GST 310)
Velutha is brutally beaten like this, just because he violates the love laws and has loved and touched the upper class woman and thus exhibited courage to challenge the custom and culture. Thus, ultimately “Velutha and not the elite Ammu, is tortured to death by the police, the history’s henchman” (308). The lack of sympathy of the policemen “reveals that Untouchables are not just considered as members of the lowest possible social standing, but as rabid animals. Indeed, Velutha’s death gives an awareness of Indian culture beyond the simple constructs of Touchable and Untouchable” (Bedjaoui 161).

In order to escape from this strangling environment, the low-caste people converted themselves into Christianity, when the British came to Malabar. Quite ironically, it aggravated their problem and increased their grievance. Pandey claims that “they were doubly cheated: they were torn between two worlds - one rejected by them and the other not ready to accept them. Even the Independence of the country went against them” (174). Their conversion to Christianity denies the privileges of the government like job reservations, bank loans at a low interest rate and so on. “It was a little like having to sweep away your foot prints without a broom. Or worse not being allowed to leave foot prints at all” (GST 74).

The inhuman treatment that these untouchables are entitled to suffer is very sympathetically narrated by Roy. When Velutha’s father Vellayapappen goes to report the forbidden relationship between his son
and Ammu out of loyalty and self-pity, Mammachi pushes him in the rain and calls him a “Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar” (256). Mammachi thinks of their love making, his “particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited” (258). Baby Kochamma too utters vehemently how “could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed, they have a particular smell, these Paravans” (78). She prefers “an Irish-Jesuit smell to a particular Paravan’s smell” (78). All these restrictions imposed on the lower class people “subtly indicates that social mobility was extremely difficult, if not impossible, in the given circumstances” (Ghotra 248).

Hariharan too registers in her novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* that people in India are discriminated in the name of caste and it is conveyed through Ganesan, the neighbour of Vasu Master’s father who sows the seeds of bigotry in the minds of other Brahmins. He avers, “with all these other people all over the place, you know (he coughed delicately), we Brahmins must keep together. Otherwise what’s the use of independence” (GVM 239). Hariharan announces her protest against such inequity in the name of caste through Vasu Master’s father who condemns such people which indeed gives a peep into the Indian society: “We live in a divided house and you talk of a bigger, bloodier share. Go if you want - go spread some more of the poison that is choking all of us” (239). And his questions,
“who murdered Gandhi? Who is murdering his child?” (239) are highly stimulating and thought provoking.

In In Times of Siege also, Hariharan highlights that in a multicultural country like India, caste and religion are the two patenting sources of mindless violence and atrocities. A historic lesson written by Shiv gets distorted and a lot of hue and cry occur in “exaggerating the problem of caste” and accusing him with a false allegation that he has “written in a very biased way about the Brahmins and temple priests” (TS 54). The socially committed author utilizes this opportunity to give a realistic picture of the social and political set up of India. The social group called Ithihas Suraksha Manch claims that “the lesson distorts History” (55) and Hariharan comments sarcastically through Shiv that the “group is called the Ithihas Suraksha Manch. The protection of history! Whoever heard of history having to be protected” (55). Hariharan exemplifies that caste division and discrimination are now a raging problem as in the past. Much of the atrocities are committed due to this social vice. She gives a historical account of the destruction of Kalyana, the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire which was the outcome of an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin and a cobbler. The touchable society could never imagine “a cobbler and a Brahmin in the same bed?” As a result, the “King Bijjala was pressured into” condemning the marriage. “He sentenced the fathers of the bride and bridegroom to a special death. Tied to horses, they were dragged
through the streets of Kalyana; then what was left of them was beheaded” (62).

This being history, the dedicated history professor presents it candidly in his course material. But it invites plethora of agitations which help the writer highlight the political condition of India. She unfolds how for personal benefits, organizations like *Ithikas Suraksha Manch* create chaos in the country in the name of caste and accuse the historian like Shiv for his dedication as a teacher.

The spirit spreads to other *Manch* members and one among them demeans Shiv by calling him a traitor who is loyal to Pakistan and Muslims. He attacks Shiv for undermining Hinduism and reducing its saints as ordinary men. It also threatens to harm his wife and daughter. Violent nature of the mob spreads fast and here Hariharan unveils the highly vulnerable state of an Indian society where meek and weak are marginalized like the protagonist Shiv. Hariharan exploits this occasion to rebuke the society and its people “who can’t hiccup without consulting caste rules don’t want it talked about in text books” (88).

The outburst of Shiv when asked about India’s past gives the true image of India which is split into different parts in the name of caste and religion in which the marginalized people suffer a lot. If anyone dares to propel the issue, his life is doomed. Shiv avers that this is due to “a fear of history. A fear that our history will force people to see that our past, like
our present, has always had critics of social divisions that masquerade as religion and tradition. So what do these frightened people do? They whitewash historical figures, they seize history …” (97-98).

Religion in India is one of the major segregating forces like caste within the multireligious societies. It is exploited by the majority to wield power over the weak minority. In India, religion plays a vital role in moulding its culture. As Pinto has rightly commented, religion “has been considered the soul of culture. Through religion people express their basic needs and aspirations” (107). It is an equally delicate issue that can instil discrimination in the minds of the highly vulnerable Indian society. The historian and retired professor Atre in In Times of Siege stimulate a breech among the people of India in the name of religion. Though people like him assert themselves to be the protectors of history they in truth kindle discrimination in the minds of the sensitive mass. Atre proclaims books that over emphasize caste divisions and project the Hindu religion and Hindu culture in a poor light should be prevented. He also questions people who feel free to revile Hinduism could dare to criticise Islam.

Foreign invasions, century old subjugation and despotism have resulted in violent outbursts of the patriotic and religious feelings in the minds of the natives and they repeat the same act of suppression and teach the same lesson of marginalization and repression they learned from their colonizers. Hariharan uses Madhav Sadashiv, one of the Manch’s members
as a mouthpiece to drive home the Hindu’s vehement quest to assert dominance over other minority group as a means of expressing their protest. She writes such people have the unquenchable thirst to establish Hinduism with its due respect: “Foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt Hindu culture and language, learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion and must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture… or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation” (100).

Amar, one of the characters in *In Times of Siege* represents how a young citizen should think in a heterogeneous country like India. He expresses his annoyance against the intolerance shown by the majority towards the minority. He enlists, “campaigns against Christians, the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children, assault on a teacher, the disruption of the shooting of a film on the plight of Hindu widow in Benares” and as Amar says “The list is endless” (100). Through, Amar, Hariharan expresses her strong resentment against violence against minority in the name of religion.

Desai too hints at caste and class as discriminatory factors that spoil the unity of a multicultural country like India. When Chawla is informed the affair of his daughter with an ice-cream vendor, he is furious. His advice to the daughter clearly points out the status of lower class people in India. He says, “You are not to associate with ice-cream vendors. A shop-
keeper type! In fact, not even a shop-keeper type. An ice-cream cart type. Our family name will be destroyed. You should set your rights higher than yourself, not lower” (HGO 149).

In the course of her exquisite narration Desai depicts how affinity to one’s caste and class are inherited from birth by every Indian and it is very much an inherent and indispensable part of one’s culture. It is rooted in his culture and anyone who transgresses it is mercilessly punished by the society. The parents forsake even their offspring to safeguard this cultural belief. Desai explicates this tendency through the portrayal of the life of the protagonist Sai. When “Sai’s parents eloped, the family in Gujarat, feeling disgraced disowned her mother” (IL 28).

Aversion for other social group is rampantly prevalent in India. Desai communicates this aspect of the Indians through the Mon Ami sisters. Noni the spinster feels that it “was important to draw lines properly between classes or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide” (67). The sisters despise the Russians and express their odium for the Nepalese: “I tell you, these Neps can’t be trusted. And they don’t just rob. They think absolutely nothing of murdering, as well” (45). Postcolonial aversion for the colonizer is expressed by Uncle Potty who spurns English girls: “Dreadful legs those English girls have…. Big pasty things. Good thing they’ve started wearing pants now” (46).
While some group of people like the Bengalis and Tamils are glorified by the Indians, others are despised. In *The Inheritance of Loss* an “attempt has been made demonstrate the secondary treatment one gets because one belongs to a different race and comes from a different ethnicity” (V. Singh 14). They have the belief that the People of Bengal are cleverer. When the Nepali tutor performs well he expresses his surprise. He also praises Bengalis, Malayalis, and the Tamils whereas subjugates Nepalese as “poor things” (73). They are bluntly discriminated. In the belief that Nepalese can only be good soldiers, coolies, they are not allowed to become doctors and government workers. They are considered only as servants. Their children are denied the privilege of learning their language and are deprived of the right to “compete for jobs when they have already been promised to others” (159). They are often referred as “‘they’ ‘neps,’ ‘all budhoos,’ ‘no brains,’ ‘louts,’ and untrustworthy, who would kill you for mere fifty rupees?” (Kaur 136).

The Gorkhas who have built so many houses and cities are shorn of all these privileges. They have neither proper abode nor clothing. It is this unbearable discrimination and repression result in violent revolt. They formed a party to address their problems. “They drew blood from their thumbs with their kukris to write a poster demanding Gorkha land, in blood” (IL 159). A well educated commissioner too nurtures such a biased
view. He hates the judge “and he hated Patels, always out to seek their own advantage, like jackals” (303).

Desai professes that extreme affinity to one’s culture and nation can lead to despise and vanquish other races. She has utilized a character named Mr. Ipe to give expression to this idea. He is an immigrant who expresses his dissatisfaction and antagonism for the Nepalese when he has read that those people are creating trouble in his country. He, living in the U.S. exclaims, that they “should kick the bastards back to Nepal. Bangladeshis to Bangladesh, Afghans to Afghanistan, all Muslims to Pakistan, Tibetans Bhutanese, why are they sitting in our country” (228). However, he justifies his stay in the USA, “‘This country is different’, he said without shame. ‘Without us what would they do?’” (228).

As part of globalization, there emerged a longing among the people of the third world countries to move towards the first world countries in search of green pasture. Consequently, it brings in its course alienation and oppression. The worst kind of marginalization is experienced by a person in exile who is uprooted from his own soil and transplanted in a completely alien locale. The “concept of exile involves the idea of a separation or distancing from literal homeland or a cultural and ethnic origin” (Budholia 55). Hariharan vividly describes the plight and angst of Indians who are caught up in diasporic situations. Their stay in an alien country quells their spirit so much that they come to the level of accepting the Western
hegemony. Hariharan very candidly registers an Indian girl, Devi’s strenuous effort to fit herself in the unfamiliar environment. She, in America feels subdued and inferior among her American friends. Though Devi tries hard to shed her inhibitions, she could feel her inborn shyness overwhelming her and she has to reassure herself now and then with the idea this was just like India. While the Americans enjoy the evening, Devi feels unfit there and found that she has very little to say. “The music throbbed in her head, and she listened to snatches of conversation, words that drifted by and that she recognized but separate, fragmented, like words in a foreign language she had recently learnt, but still could not put together to make sense” (4).

Displacement mortifies one’s soul and spirit beyond redemption and it has been meticulously articulated by Desai through the portrayal of the life of Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Kaur visualises that the “experience of migrancy and diaspora also engenders various problems and facets of journey and relocation in new lands e.g. displacement, uprootedness, unbelongingness, discrimination, marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural conflicts, yearning for home and homeland etc.” (30). However, the United States of America and the United Kingdom have been the attractive zones for the inhabitants of the third world countries like India. They can abjure anything to reach these dreamlands.
The desperate efforts taken by the people to reach these enthralling first world countries have been very well portrayed by Desai through her characters Biju, Saeed and Jemubhai Patel, the judge. Desai goes wordy in depicting the overwhelming feeling of humiliation endured by these people who reach the West in search of a better life. She brings to light the agony of displacement, rootlessness and nostalgia for home and homeland suffered by most of the migrants amidst their struggle for survival in the alien land. He secures his visa to America in his second whack which though is not a fair one. On receiving a tourist visa, Biju discerns that he is the most fortunate man under the sun. He is oblivious of the fact that a deleterious life awaits him there. Once he steps into this dream land as an undocumented immigrant, he suffers from utter loneliness. However, Biju tries to beef up his courage, though the imperial power tries to squirm his spirits.

Biju’s enticing dream of a secured life gets shattered as his tourist visa could not substantiate to provide him a promising employment. He works as an undocumented worker in several restaurants along with many other third world people like Achootan and Saeed. Their existence there is quite disappointing and all the more pathetic. They are treated like intruders and they share the basement kitchen of a restaurant in America along with insects and rodents. When Biju gets injured by tumbling over the rotten spinach in Harrish Harry’s restaurant, he requests the owner to
take him to the doctor who instantly turns it down. Sensing the inconsiderate attitude of his boss, Biju demands medical aid enunciating that it is the owner’s responsibility to take care of the needs of the employer. At this point Harrish emerges out with these reviling words which clearly divulge the pathetic plight of the immigrants: “What right do you have? Is it my fault you don’t even clean the floor? You should have to pay ME for not cleaning, living like a pig. Am I telling you to live like a pig?”(IL 188). This kind of humiliation is very common in the first world countries. Desai expresses a similar view in one of her interviews given to a private television channel. She avers: “I don’t know a single Indian to whom it [humiliation] has not happened. Anyone dark skinned basically from another part of the world faces this in the west …it destroys your confidence and your dignity immediately” (qtd. in Gnanasekaran 12). If this is the case of the legal immigrants, one can conjure up the intensity of the agony met with by the illegal immigrants like Biju.

People like Saeed prepare themselves to marry even the invalid citizens of America to procure a green card which can give them some solace in the foreign land. The alien weather too makes the displaced people’s lives quite unbearable. Biju finds it extremely difficult to adapt to the climatic condition and he literally collapses in the street and laments over his pathetic existence. Lack of food, care and extreme cold weather torment both his soul and body. Biju suffers from a sense of homelessness
and a longing to get back home. When this affliction intensifies, he takes a strong decision to return to his homeland where his father’s love and his native land can cure him from all the ailments he has undergone in his exile. His deed reminds one of T.S. Eliot’s lines

A man’s destination is his own village…

Scarred but secure, he has many memories…

Of foreign men, who fought in foreign places…

Foreign to each other …

Every country is home to one man

And exile to another. (To the Indians who Died in Africa)

In exile people also undergo severe mental agony owing to the subjugation to the imperial power which ultimately results in the loss of self-respect and ends in identity crisis. Biju’s life bears testimony to this. Desai wants to proclaim that oppression and discriminations are quite a common thing in the Western countries. As Said has rightly commented,

Throughout the age of empire a rigid division obtained between the European colonizers and their non-European colonized people - a division which, although millions of transactions were permitted across it, was given a cultural correlative of extraordinary proportions, since in essence it maintained a strict social and cultural hierarchy between
whites and non-whites, between the members of the dominant and members of the subject race. (25)

Jemubhai Patel, the judge also goes to England to secure a better life. In his tint in England, he too encounters hegemony, alienation and discrimination. Jemubhai, being an anglophile has great respect and admiration for the Englishmen. Their culture entices him so much that he goes to Oxford University to learn English language and culture and thus, he aspires to become an Englishman. But he neither succeeds in becoming English nor an Indian as his desperate attempt to ape at the Western culture ends up in the deprivation of his own identity. No one in his dreamland comes forward to give him accommodation. He approaches nearly twenty two houses that has the ‘to let’ board, but he is denied to be let in as he is a black. This makes him feel “cornered and disgusted for his Indian race and ethnicity. His skin colour, native culture and regional accent make him strange and disgusting among English people” (V. Singh 14). In addition, his life in England proliferates his loneliness and forces him to retreat “into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became man and it crushed him into a shadow” (IL 39). Subsequently, he becomes an introvert.

To cope it all, Jemubhai is the butt of ridicule at Oxford. The girls hold their noses and giggled, “phew! he stinks of curry” (38). This remark intensifies the pangs of his already bruised psyche and produces an
immutable imprint in his heart. He begins to wash himself frequently and savagely to save himself from the contempt of the English girls. He withdraws into himself and leads a cocooned life. The civilization and culture of the elite, instead of fulfilling his dream of transformation into a better man deprives him of the normal human attributes. He “forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile …” (40). Desai also highlights how displacement has vapourized his human attributes through these evocative words: “Eventually he felt barely human at all …” (40). This could be the worst havoc that displacement can bring in. Desai being an expatriate writer, faithfully records that it is not only the immigrants who are suppressed in the first world countries but also the natives are subjugated owing to their colour. Desai writes, “… in their own country they live like monkeys in the trees. They come to India and become men” (76).

The experience of Father Booty, a Swiss citizen in *The Inheritance of Loss* ratifies the fact that displacement at any part of the world brings in humiliation. Father Booty lives at Kalimpong, where he has kept a dairy farm for over forty five years and he feels quite at home there. During the insurgency period, he has been identified as a different race and has been deported to his country without taking into notice the service he has extended to the Indian society which is much more than that of any Indian citizen. As a result, he loses “everything but his memory” (251).
Desai vindicates that the diasporic existence is linked not only with “transnational land across political borders” (Kaur 5). It also subsumes existential problems within one’s national boundaries too. As Tejinder Kaur avers, diaspora or displacement “signifies all migrations, settlements, journeys and movements… across the world, both from the Third to the First world and vice-versa, from North to South and East to West and even from one state to another within the same country…”(2). Desai too is exposed to this type of migration that happens within one’s motherland and so registers in *The Inheritance of Loss* the problems encountered by these people who move away from their hometown to another part of the country to earn their livelihood like the cook or to settle in a beautiful place to enjoy their retired life like that of the Mon Ami sisters.

In the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* the cook Panna Lal moves from Uttar Pradesh to Kalimpong in order to earn his livelihood, a migration that happens within his own country. He feels dejected after the death of his wife and the responsibility of bringing up his son Biju falls upon him. This has driven him to Kalimpong where he works as a cook in the judge’s house. Uprooted from his culture, the cook undergoes only humiliation and impoverishment. The pathetic state of his hut and possessions depict the sorry state of his existence. Whenever he demands a hike in the wages, he is humiliated by the judge. The indifference of his master compels him to brew alcohol illegally to earn his livelihood. The dog Mutt in the novel is
given more care and affection than this man and when the dog is lost due to
the carelessness of the cook, he is beaten very savagely by the judge which
depicts the height of human humiliation. Thus displacement has not in any
way helped the cook to reach his goal of achieving a better life.

The Mon Ami sisters Noni and Lola emigrate to Kalimpong to lead
a peaceful and healthy life as per the wish of Lola’s husband Joydeep. This
decision of moving from their hometown Bengal proves very unfortunate
during the insurgency period. The Gorkhas who considered the emigrants
to be responsible for their poor state of existence ransacked their house.
The beautiful vegetable garden is illegally encroached by the agitators as a
kind of punishment for occupying their land. When Lola comes out, to her
surprise, she finds small huts before their house, and she asks them to clear
the place as it is their property. The rebels rudely spell out “It is not your
land. It is free land, they putting down the sentence flatly, rudely” (IL 240).
Lola approaches the Pradan to complaint about the encroachment. Instead
of being unbiased, he makes some obscene remarks that make Lola think
and lament about their unwise decision to move from Calcutta with the
hope of establishing a peaceful life which has in fact brought nothing but
humiliation.

Sai Mistry, the protagonist of The Inheritance of Loss also tastes the
sour fruit of displacement from her childhood. She, being the offspring of
cross cultural marriage, is compelled to be segregated from her parents at
the age of six. At first, she was dislocated from her parents towards a convent hostel which made her childhood unpleasant. After the death of her parents in an accident, she undergoes her second displacement in her life. This time, she is deported to an entirely suffocating environment of her apathetic grandfather’s house at Kalimpong. Sai’s first night at the grandfather’s house in Kalimpong is a very intimidating one. She has a fear of having entered a space very big. It moved both backward and forward, ready to grind everything into dust. Such terrifying thoughts spring up in her mind due to the absence of love and care in her grandfather. Loneliness becomes her only companion till the arrival of her mathematics teacher Gyan. He too deserts her on perceiving a cultural plurality in her character which she has inherited as a part of this displacement. As a result, she loses this temporary respite too and thus displacement ultimately engenders fiasco in her life.

Desai registers in *The Inheritance of Loss* the historic condition of North India in the 1980s when the Gorkha agitations were gaining momentum. Desai feels that the agitation is also an outcome of displacement that happened before independence. The Nepalese are the neglected race in India. They are denied a comfortable life whereas people who emigrated from other parts of the country live comfortably in their soil. In their desperate state of mind, they discern that the people who have migrated from Bihar and Bengal after independence, are responsible for
their disgraceful existence. So they resolve to punish them through violent means to get back their right to better life. It too ensues in the total annihilation of peace and Desai affirms that no one really benefits from such riots and violence are in no way they will resolve problems. Through *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai appears to have demonstrated the racial differences as political construct which serve the interest of a certain groups of people and marginalize others to establish their interests.

Economic instability and inequality are one among other factors that results in discriminating people. Economic inequality prevails even within the same family among its members due to gender inequity. In *The God of Small Things* Chacko, the son of Mammachi marries a foreign lady and lives with her for sometime in England. Soon there develops some difference of opinion in the conjugal life and he divorces her and returns home. He is warmly welcomed by everyone and the family takes extra care to satisfy his man’s need and the factory, the family’s only property is given to him and he presides over everything. Whereas, the daughter Ammu too marries a person from another community, gets divorce for no fault of hers and returns to her village. She is not welcomed like her brother, but rather considered a burden. While Chacko is given the large share of property, Ammu is denied even her just share, though both have done the same thing. It ruins her life and confines it to shackles. Roy also portrays with anguish that it is poverty that compels women working in
Chacko’s pickle factory to share bed with him to accomplish his ‘men’s need’.

Hariharan also dabbles with the discrimination inflicted on individual in the name of impoverishment in The Ghosts of Vasu Master. It is another “great divide one observes in the society [that creates]… the gulf between the rich and the poor or in the communistic terminology the divide between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’”. (Pinto111). Even educational institutions are not spared from discrimination. At the school in which Vasu Master taught, the students are given three different grades of punishment. “The first and mildest sort was reserved for the sons of the very rich”. Hariharan adds that usually it was only the old rich families that would send their sons to the Convent and Bishop’s Boys School and Vasu Master’s school “got the rich shop keepers’ sons” and the “teachers were not expected to punish these boys”. Instead, they had to be sent only to the Head Master who “would lecture to him on how he was the pride of PG and if he did not behave like a model pupil, who would the other less fortunate boys look up to” (GVM 46-47). The second degrees of the boys are put to work. They do dusting books, sweeping and to polish the school’s furniture. “The third and most dire grade of punishment was reserved for… the poorest boys. Several of them were made to fail year after year.” (47). Through such writings, Hariharan lets out her condemnation against the Indian educational system which instead of
enlightening the younger generation instils discrimination in the young minds and sows the seed of hatred towards the weak. Her contempt gets revealed through Vasu Master who says, “I knew something of Veera Naidu’s tactics, for example, of luring pupils with rich fathers and squeezing the last few drops of blood from a poor boy’s family” (101). Hariharan also highlights how such blind craving for money kindles one to transgress from the path of virtue. She derisively remarks that Veera Naidu, the Head master who has preached “honesty is a pearl, simplicity an uncut diamond” (152), accepts bribe to make Raman who failed in his examinations pass by accepting bribe from his father.

Poverty deprives man of his human attributes and makes him inferior. As Chaturvedi opines the “ditch between the rich and poor is the bane of social set-up” (179). The rich and the mighty, enjoy an upper hand in everything. The poor, on the other hand, “are forced to live from hand to mouth not withstanding their diligence and austerity” (180). Desai articulates such a view in the course of the portrayal of the cook Panna Lal. He is very seldom addressed by his name. It is his extreme poverty that compels him to work as a cook in the house of the merciless judge and to cringe to him in spite of his beastly treatment. There are plenty of men in a developing country like India whose inferior status due to economic disparity, prepares them to accept humiliation. Desai points out that it has been imprinted in their minds, “passed down through generations for poor
people needed certain lines; the script was always the same, and they had no option but to beg for mercy” (IL 6). They believe that crying alone could save them and Desai further emphasises the thought through the judge who too pronounces indignantly these “damn servants born and brought up to scream” (8).

Another deplorable condition of the poor is that they are often viewed with an air of suspicion. When the gun of the judge is robbed, the police first suspect the cook because it is a blind belief nourished by the upper class people. “Every one knew it was the servants who indulge very often in robbery” (12). It results in the ransacking of the cook’s house. The pathetic condition of the hut in which the cook lives evokes pity. It also shows the poignancy of the marginalized people’s suffering and their economic state. All the things discarded from Cho Oyu, the master’s home find place in the cook’s hut. It pains one’s “heart to see how little he had” (13). Moreover, the search undertaken by the police has done unredeemable injury in the heart of the cook as the police men “had exposed the cook’s poverty, the fact that he was not looked after, that his dignity had no basis; they ruined the façade and threw it in his face” (18).

The poor become scapegoats of the cultural system of a society. The police who are supposed to investigate without any bias neglect their duty and use their power to victimize the poor. *The Inheritance of Loss* reports one such instance. When the judge lodges a complaint regarding the
missing of guns, the police arrest a poor servant. They are quite aware that it is stolen by the Gorkha rebels. Still they shut their eyes to reality and just to convince the judge arrest a poor man instead. They “hadn’t bothered to find out the name of the man they had beaten and blinded” (263). The pathetic questions raised by the poor man’s wife stir the minds of the readers: “Who do you go to when you’re poor? People like us have to suffer…. We are not even Nepalis, we are Lepchas” (263).

Desai wants to insinuate the surprising fact to her Indian readers that poverty is a global issue. She enunciates it through the judge who goes to England to pursue his Indian Civil Service training. He is surprised to see houses made of mud in the colonizers’ land. Desai writes: “It took him by surprise because he’d expected only grandness, hadn’t realized that here, too, people could be poor and live unaesthetic lives” (38). Desai also hints at the poverty of the tribes of Zanzibar and the impoverished class of her native land the Gorkhas and has thus presented poverty as a universal cause of discrimination in any society.

Discrimination, whatever be its nature, leads to the crushing of one’s spirit and diminish one as a person with no self-respect and question his own identity and purpose of living. “Identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-image of an individual, a gender, a community, a class, race, or a sex or a nation-real or imaginary dealing with the existence and role….these are the quests for equality and dignity for their progress and
development” (Chandra 150). However, the critics of multiculturalism argue that identities are determined by power relations. Roy has beautifully portrayed this in her novel *The God of Small Things*. The twins who are discriminated for their mother’s mistake and it devastates their spirit irredeemably that they lose their identity ultimately. As a consequence of Ammu’s transgression of the laws of the society, she is compelled to send her son Estha, the clever and most pragmatic one to his father. After twenty three years, his father sends him back and Roy writes that the father “‘re-returned’ him as though he was a mere object – a book perhaps” (GST 9). The years he has spent with his father quells his identity completely. He has lost the very human attribute of talking and has “acquired the ability to blend into the background of whatever he was – into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets – to appear inanimate, almost invisible… Estha occupied very little space in the world” (10-11). He forgets to mingle with the boys of his age and in their activities. After his schooling, he begins to work like a woman – doing cleaning, washing cooking, sweeping etc. He was referred by the author as a “quite bubble floating on a sea of noise” (11).

Roy also reveals how the acceptance of hegemony of the Western culture affects the identity of the natives and degrades them as anglophiles. Bedjaoui rightly affirms that,
it is a common assumption that identity formation is a universal feature of human experience, one’s source of meaning and experience. It is fair to say that the impact of westernization or globalization on the Indian cultural sphere has sometimes been viewed in a pessimistic light. It is associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the encroachment of homogenized and westernized culture, i.e. with the construction of hybrid identities, neither indigenous nor exogenous. (164)

Identity crisis is a common deterioration that one witnesses in the postcolonial India and it has been wonderfully presented by the novelist. Hariharan subtly irradiates through *In Times of Siege* that a person cannot achieve identity and self-respect through education or economic stability. The protagonist Shiv a well educated history professor too suffers from rootlessness and lack of identity. When a bold and pretty girl comes with an injured leg to his home, it is Shiv who feels out of home whereas, the girl feels comfortable. When the *Manch* and some of his colleagues create much uproar in the name of his history lesson, all Shiv’s courage dribble out from him and he suffers from utter desolation and views himself as “a creature apart, a foreigner like Mrs.Khan, the core faculty may as well be complete strangers to him” (TS 119).
Desai’s novel *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* humorously delineates how too much domination and care results in discriminating a person by depriving him of his self respect and identity. Sampath is a victim of this type of hegemony which many encounter in Indian families. Finally, he escapes to a jungle where he finds solace in the company of monkeys and the guava fruits and ultimately undergoes metamorphosis and becoming a fruit himself, totally devoid of human identity. Desai also shows how constant repression in his sojourn in the UK deprives Jemubhai, the judge of his identity. His sister very poignantly presents this: “We sent you abroad to become a gentleman, and instead you have become a lady” (IL 167). Though humorous, these words convey the intensity of humiliation which has affected his self respect and makes him feel coy like a lady. He becomes “conscious of his dark skin, his curry smell, his unpronounceable name…. He becomes Anglophilic, soaking up English mannerisms, taking on English airs, rejecting what he was, while knowing… who he is”(New York Review 18). On the other hand, the poverty of the cook drives him rootless and devoid of any identity. He feels that he is not “wanted in Kalimpong and he didn’t belong” (IL 278).

Biju, the cook’s son returns to his native land as he feels his sojourn at the USA has strangled his spirit. However, when he steps into his country he loses everything − his baggage, his savings, “worst of all… his pride. Back from America with far less than he’d ever had” (317). Through
this, Desai shows marginalization as a part of global culture and as Michael Carlisle has rightly reviewed all her “characters struggle with their cultural identity and the forces of modernization…” (Publishers Weekly web).

Hariharan shows that aging can also be one of the factors of discrimination that annihilates one’s identity. This is proven validly through *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. It unfolds how old age and retirement from job makes one like Vasu Master feel marginalized. He deems as if he “was on the last page” (GVM 5). He begins to think himself as a lowly creature like a crow or a mouse or a spider, sometimes even lower than these insects and animals as “they went about their business” (6), whereas he has nothing to do. As a result, he begins to consider them especially the mouse as his companion and “had arrived at an unspoken point of co-existence” (7).

Vasu Master is afflicted with identity crisis that comes to many along with old age. Hariharan insinuates this artistically through an incident in which he looks at his wife’s mirror. He appears a stranger to himself and describes that the stranger “had grey, thinning hair. His face was scarred: pockmarks, creases, a map of lines and grills” (40). The eyes are the most striking one. They look as though they are “hounded animals” (40), which verbalize his lack of self respect. It affects his career as a teacher. His pupils also resent respecting him. All this bitter experiences along with the physical weakness which makes him despise Gods. He says
that they are “all but stomachs, and we all but food: They eat us hungrily and when they are full, they belch us” (99). Generally, all human beings believe that God is there to provide help and protect them. The contrary view expressed by Vasu Master explains how affected and marginalized he is. He laments over the fruitlessness of life. He perceives life as a race. “The only way we know (and teach) is running an obstacle-race. You jump over a hurdle only to find you are facing the next. Battle again; then yet another hurdle. To overcome each, you need the password someone else made up” (119).

The intensity of marginalization that Vasu Master undergoes is beautifully articulated by contrasting it with the resilience and confidence displayed by young Gopu, the brother of Mani. Hariharan presents how Vasu Master’s timidity and lack of ambition drive him to the margin of life, whereas ambitious people like Gopu get priority. Vasu Master expresses that in the presence of Gopu, he feels as helpless as Mani. Gopu’s presence always makes him uncomfortable. He “quavered at the thought” of Gopu as of “a gun or a home made bomb” (162). His anxiety is conveyed at her best through the story of Bandicoot that reiterates the universal truth that the weak one will be haunted and destroyed by the strong. This fear of being hunted, crushes his spirit and undergoes total loss of identity and he laments pathetically “I – where did I or Mani for that matter, fit in this battlefield” (189).
Old age apparently marginalizes a person however powerful he may be when he was young. Hariharan who presented this thought as the crux of the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, hints at it in yet another novel *When Dreams Travel* (DT). The Sultan of Shahabad who ruled over his kingdom with iron hand is finally imprisoned by his son. He advocates this thought: “Your time is past, father. Now you should if it is not too late – turn your thoughts to the all merciful and plead forgiveness for your sins” (DT 102). These unkind words of the son bring the Sultan nearly to tears. Hariharan thus exemplifies, how old age has made him a handicap and how “Shahryar, the all powerful Sultan of Shahabad, is left behind in the tomb meant for Shahrzad, a prisoner of his memories” (102). Hariharan discloses how a little deviance from normalcy also results in discrimination by the majority. The delineation of her character Mani provides ample evidence for it. He is marginalized by everyone in the society just because he looks a little different. His head is a bit longer than the rest of the body. This results in the reaping of humiliation by this simple soul. Hariharan tries hard to hide her anguish against the inhuman attitudes of even the well-educated people like the teachers. To protect himself Mani becomes violent. He uses his big hard head like a “charging bull and butted anyone who spoke to him or came near him” (9). Thus, Mani becomes a subaltern just because he is slow to pick up things. He is also expelled from several
schools and is also beaten continuously. He is beaten and the worst of all, he is forgotten for days together.

This sort of marginalization belittles Mani to the status of “a hounded animal, always on the alert, might do when it identifies danger and prepares itself for escape” (13). He finds himself unable to sit in a place and study. “He wandered around the small room, a strange captive animal” (13). The physical deformity relegates Mani to the status of an animal that too hunted or captive animal, easily vulnerable.

Hariharan suggests that Mani does not deserve such a bitter treatment. A little deed of benevolence will help him to acquire a normal life. This is implicated through Vasu Master whose stories help Mani to attain peace. When Vasu Master opens his mouth to tell a story, all his agitation vanishes. He listens to the story with open mouth. However, the society is not ready to extend a helping hand to them and as a result, people like Mani suffer and the intensity of their sufferings is communicated at its best through the story of Blue bottle narrated by Vasu Master. The deplorable plight of Mani to establish in the society is explained symbolically through the story of a strange looking fly called Blue bottle.

Desai too registers how a person slightly varying from the majority is despised and thrown to the periphery. Sampath of *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is marginalized due to his eccentricities. He is rebuked by everyone including his father and sister. This made him “hate his life. It
was a prison he had been born into. The onetime he had a little bit of fun, he was curtailed and punished. He was born unlucky, that’s what it was” (HGO 43). He feels like a caged animal. “His face bore a desperate hunted look” (186). The surrounding, to him, appeared a trap or maze from which he could not escape. His heart is broken by all that happen around him. “Surely he thought, his surroundings were detrimental to his mental health” (43). The hegemonic surrounding deprives his human self and he feels the spirit of the guava fruit has engulfed him. It supplies him with courage unknown to him. His mother Kulfi misunderstands his changed self and she thinks that it is out of hunger that he behaves strangely. She attempts to pacify him by asking if he wants egg. The reply that Sampath gives marks the new emerged self of Sampath: “No, I do not want an egg…. I want my freedom” (47). Though humorously portrayed, the repressing environment’s negative impact on an individual is well articulated by Desai in Sampath’s fleeing into wilderness and his final metamorphosis into a guava. This ironically insinuates that only in wilderness far away from the human existence that a marginalized minority can find solace.

All the chosen writers seem to believe that ultimately any kind of discrimination results in rebellion and revolt. Hariharan also promulgates this view. The all powerful Veera Naidu inflicted hegemony on his students and teachers; but when it reaches its climax the teachers, parents and pupils conspire and “form a motley army and march towards Veera
Naidu’s office, shouting slogans about bribes and donations, favouritism, suspended teachers and students” (GVM 183). Hariharan asserts the fact through Mani also. When he feels he is compelled, he too agitates against oppression. To protect himself, he takes a pen-knife to attack them.

Hariharan registers her remonstration against all sort of marginalizing forces and shows how they shatter the growth of a great country and split it into pieces. She also hammers out the significance of the people occupying the periphery and their “‘little’ traditions that are critical of the mainstream tradition, have also contributed to the country’s social, cultural and political life” (TS 170).

Years of suppression ended in the violent outburst in which all marginalization melted and the centre get scattered. This is true of the rebellious attack of the Gorkha National Liberation Front which is powerfully presented by Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. The age old suppression and negligence turn the marginalized cultural class Gorkhas to take refuge in violence to get back their identity and roots. “As the agitation for Gorkhaland gathers momentum, incident after incident successfully proves the erosion of power and authority of those who occupy a position of centrality in the existing system” (Raza 59). They try to reverse the social order by persecuting those who suppressed them so far. “…they also stock-piled guns, drew maps, plotted the bombing of bridges, hatched plans” (IL 210) to drive away the people who had so far
enjoyed life. Their main targets are the upper class and implemented plots to humiliate those who were once their masters. Desai elaborates this through the Gorkha guys ransacking the house of the judge. They humiliate the judge but leave the cook without any harm. The judge is addressed mockingly as Sahib and he is forced to prepare tea for the rebels. He is further humiliated by making him shout their slogans and asking him to repeat continuously “I am a fool” (7). As a part of the cyclic process, the people who occupied the centre and enjoyed life become victims during the insurgency. The wealth that seemed to protect them like a blanket becomes the cause for their affliction. Desai hereby tips off that India’s cultural and social set up is such as that every individual can be vulnerable to the changing social and political power which does not remain constantly in one’s hand.

The fictional narratives of Roy, Hariharan and Desai have thus, given a cross section of India’s social and cultural milieu, “wherein stereotyping and silencing of the subaltern have become the norm” (Jamuna 123) and they uniformly present a “fictional account of the perils lying in wait for those who venture in their attempt to break the imposed silence, to leap towards centre” (Venugopalan 70). Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai have proclaimed in a single voice, how hegemony and oppression are the two sides of the same coin that exist irrespectively across India and as an issue nurtured by the society forms
very much the crux of its culture. They have shown the factors that lead to subjugation and condemn them and warn them at the same time by pronouncing that anyone in the country who occupies the centre can be thrown to periphery and every one is vulnerable here.

Thus, these writers have attempted to pronounce the problems of the weak and the marginalized through their respective novels. They illustrate that though the centre − margin conflict started in the colonial time itself, it continues to exist in all its form and intensity even in the present, where the weak enjoy only the status of the ‘other’ occupying the periphery. The contemporary literature reflects this unchanged social status. However, the socially committed writers like Roy, Hariharan and Desai unanimously display their unfaltering concern to create awareness among their readers against all types of marginalization and thus disclose their social staunchness.