CHAPTER-V

Summing Up:
Pastures New
In this very brief final chapter, some of the main lines of argument present in the preceding chapters are brought together by way of summing up.

The present exclusive study is aimed at comparing the portrayal of the outcastes in the Indian society and exposing the mental sufferings of the marginalized which has been depicted in the select works of Mulk Raj Anand, Narendra Jadhav and Mahasweta Devi. All the three writers have portrayed realistically the misery, the agony and the pain of the oppressed in our society and also the sufferings of the women belonging to all castes. In all the three writers the theme of oppression, the theme of alienation and of the radical feeling to rebel against the existing system in the society and also against the wealthy are seen. All these express the opinion that there is a need to treat all the human beings equally.

The first of the three writers is Mulk Raj Anand, who is considered an outstanding figure of Indo-Anglian fiction. He has established himself as the Chief Spokesman of the Indo-Anglican literary naturalism with a non proletarian bias. All his novels have a strong social purpose. In an article entitled, *How I Became a Writer*, Anand himself says, “All my novels and short fiction arose from a long confession of nearly two thousand pages which I wrote from the compulsion of a morbid obsession with myself and the people who possessed me, deep in my conscience. This body soul search, in my autobiographical narrative, was narrated to the young daughter of a professor of philosophy, sometimes out of vanity, sometimes because of the urge to communicate the troubles of my bad conscience, and mostly from the burning and melting inevitably to the young poets’ desire for verification. As no one would publish the enormous narrative, I took some of the characters or rather;
the characters compelled me to put them down, in shorter, more compact, but still formless, novels”. (How I Became a Writer, vi).

Mr. Anand, at some point of time, even complains that his works have been greeted as ‘Communist propaganda’ and the Illustrated Weekly of India is often content with a two line dismissal of everything he writes. Mulk Raj Anand has often been branded as a social propagandist, and critical opinions are sharply divided on his claims to be considered as a serious literary artist. Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah says: “Mulk Raj Anand has had a long standing as a writer of fiction, but he has not had his share of praise from the serious literary critic. He has been dubbed a social propagandist without being read and unfortunately the titles of his novels have had a good deal to do with the prevalent prejudice. It is good to remember that all art is, in a sense, propaganda, and it is the treatment that should decide. The social concerns and artistic preoccupations seem to take hold of Anand and by turns, and where the two fuse as, say, in ‘Untouchable’ the novel is safe and its course is one of absorbing human interest”. (Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, 57).

Mulk Raj Anand is the literary master and the leader of the downtrodden. As a writer, he tried to contribute what most of the Indian national leaders tried to do politically. As a delineator of Indian social life, he has his soft corner for the poor masses. His heart breaks for the downstream of society like untouchables, coolies, poor peasants or such others who have been cruelly exploited by the higher ranks of society.

C.J. George rightly says, “Anand’s social criticism is sustained by his faith that an artist can contribute immensely towards social change. Of all Indian creative writers writing in English, Anand is perhaps the most concerned with the question, ‘What is literature?’ By far his clearest and most acceptable
views on the functions of a novelist are to be found in his long confessional essay. In *Apology for Heroism* he says, “Because of his addiction to truth, the writer can help to educate humanity...far more enduringly there can the scientist or an educationalist. For, as I have insisted before, the creative writer or the poet is in a position to expose the distorters of words, aspire for the truth, to take a whole some view of the world, a view which is both extensive and intensive. He is possessed of the necessary apparatus to help to exalt men to the full heights of their dignity, to equip them with the necessary spirit to, tackle the tasks before them. By giving a vent to their inmost desires and by revealing to them the true nature of men, who take part in the drama of revolt, he fore shadows the new society. He trains the higher type of human being who may not always have to seek sanction for his behaviour in the external and arbitrary rules of conduct enforced on him by others, but as an individual with the inward monitor of own conscience, who will bend before no tyrants but only follow his own enlightened will. (135).

He agrees with Shelley that creative writers are “unacknowledged legislators” of mankind and says, “The writer is like a God who realizes his own many freedoms and confers them on others.” In fact, there is hardly any ugly or depressing aspect of the Indian Social lives which has not been attacked by Anand in his fictional world. (*Neeru Tandon, 71*). He is one of the most widely translated of authors and his works have been edited criticized, interpreted, reinterpreted and researched into. “Anand has attempted to solve the problems of heterogeneous audience by choosing themes and situations that have more or less the same validity all over the country.” (72).

In this way the problems taken into account in his novels include untouchability, religious hypocrisy, child-labour, economic exploitation, the
plight of workers in a factory, the evil effects of caste system, superstition, belief in fate, class consciousness, partiality of Police, male chauvinism and such other various malpractices practised in Indian society. He focuses on these problems and tries to draw our attention with a view to realizing a better, egalitarian society may be formed where man is treated as man, and not on the basis of caste, class or creed.

It is possible because the sufferers are not the victims of fate or God only, but of manmade society. It is the social force which is responsible in creating most of these problems due to lack of love, compassion, sympathy, and human consideration among men. His protest is in a constructive manner just to create a new society in a solid manner, least bothering about criticism of the privileged class. He recollects: “I certainly felt, in the midst of my own poverty and exile, the compulsion that it is better not to win applause by conforming to my establishment, but face the privileged orders and to claim the right to notice the existence of men like Bakha”. *(The Story of My Experiments with a white Lie, 17-18).*

The novels of Anand force the existing society to go for self-awareness and introspection. Many atrocities that he attacks still appear in our society. His works are sources of unending inspiration for those organizations that work for a better society. Anand’s opinion is evident in the novels that even the poor and socially neglected people can raise to the heights if proper facilities and education are provided to them.

His *Untouchable* is an example of social concerns which seek to emphasize the evil of untouchability by focusing attention on the miserable plight, suffering, poverty and degradation of a large section of Indian Society. It is the story of not one Bakha, but the whole sufferings of the untouchable
class as a whole. Anand’s will for modernity is evident in Bakha’s thrill beyond control when he hears about the flush-out system.

He hears that machines in future shall solve all his problems and remove untouchability. Thus the novel ends on an optimistic view that change is at hand. Most of the untouchables suffer like Bakha in modern India and they feel that a change is there waiting to welcome them to lead a respectable life. But it is the caste Hindus that should change their mindset and treat all human beings equally. They bid good bye to the prevailing evil tradition and take active part in the development of humans as a whole.

In *Coolie* hunger and poverty are the subjects. The heroic struggle of the central characters has been realistically depicted. Anand’s concern for the suffering Indian masses has attained universal significance in this novel. The millions of people who have been exploited in many ways by overwork, by being less paid, by being treated as beasts, by dying primitively of hunger, suffering and disease.

To stress the universality of the sufferings of Bakha and Munoo the novelist has merely called the novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* and not ‘the Untouchable’ and ‘The Coolie’. His concern is that the reader should consider man as man. He wants to say that true comradeship of man for man lies only among the poor people. In *Coolie* the evils, injustice and the inhumanity of Colonial rule have also been exposed. “Anand is Dickensian in his ultra – sensitivity to the existence of social evil in routine forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism and human sufferings caused by a variety of factors – political, economic, social and cultural” (Premila Paul, *The Novels of MulkRaj*)
Anand: A Thematic Study, 19) Anand tries to create among the readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evils to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activate them to remove these evils and to create a just society that could protect all human beings.

As an art form, realism came into being against the idealized presentation associated with Romanticism and Naturalism. Social Realism is an offshoot of Photographic Realism and Stark Realism. Social Realism came into being because of the activities of progressive social reformers. Social realists portray realities of life with a view to moulding social reforms. Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, Coolie, etc. are novels of Social Realism.

There are several defects in society such as, untouchability, child labour, child marriage, dowry system, discrimination, gender bias. They have been there in the society for many years. Great men like Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Jyotirao Phule, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar etc. tried to root them out. They have been successful to some extent. Kandukuri’s Prahasanams, Gurajada’s Kanya Sulkam, MulkaRaj Anand’s novels such as Untouchable, Coolie try to bring about a lot of change in society.

There is certainly a change in the life of the underprivileged and disadvantaged groups and classes in Industrial Society. This concern for the lower classes, whose daily lot in an industrialized and urbanized world was largely unknown to the comfortable and affluent middle classes, generated intense activities to describe and explain ‘how the other half lives’, as organized reform tries to alleviate the condition of the poor and disadvantaged in one way (or) another. There was certainly a shift in Anand’s literary perspective after he came under the influence of Marx in 1932.
He was to deny the influence of Marxism on his writings, mainly because some critics began dismissing him as a “fellow traveler”, ‘a native Marxist’ and a propagandist. But the fact remains that Anand’s thinking is to an extent conditioned by Marxian doctrines, though in his best novels he avoids many pitfalls of the wholly committed writer.

Mulk Raj Anand has painted *Untouchable* and *Coolie* in the colors of social realism. These two novels are specimens of hard core reality of the Indian society of the early decades of Twentieth Century. They describe the sufferings of the protagonists, and record the miseries felt by them. These two pieces have together occupied a special place in Indian literature. *Untouchable* and *Coolie* gives voice to the predicament of the mute humanity in vicious circumstances. The suffering is not caused by fate but by fellow humans and the social surroundings from which the sufferers still have great hope for betterment of life. *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are the sagas of suffering of the protagonists - Bakha and Munoo.

Anand is considered a reformer; he does so because it is one of his aims to disturb his readers’ complacency to shock them out of conventional attitudes, and encourage them to make a fresh approach to experience. It is rather a narrative technique. In *Untouchable* it is that of a progressive revolutionary, of a humanist who is all compassion for the working, downtrodden classes, and social outcastes. Being a realist whose social realism has an unmistakable streak of Marxism in it, he carries his readers along, wins their confidence and establishes a close, harmonious relationship with them as well as with his characters.

Anand lays stress on the demands of the present; he refuses to be bound by stale custom and orthodoxy. In fact, his novels convey emotional
truths as well as social realities and the beauty of his art of fiction are well realized by way of analysis and interpretation of social problems and of corrupt practices as seen in *Coolie, Untouchable, The Big Heart and Two Leaves and a Bud.* He combines wide experience with architectonic skill, cosmic vision with objective truth, as in *Coolie,* a novel instinct with epic amplitude and magnificence. It is a fact that he never allows idealism to eclipse his vision of social reality.

Like Hindi writer Prem Chand, Anand too is a serious novelist, a passionate reformer and a critic of life who traces the roots of social injustice and moral degradation to the disruption based on co-operation and brotherhood and the growth of inequality and tyranny based on caste and class.

Anand garnered a rich harvest of experience before he assayed his first attempt at storytelling, despite the early age at which he has published *Untouchable.* True, he allowed his realism to include every biographical and biological factor, record every breath, and analyze every individual thought of his characters, but none would question the skill with which he observes life in its essential detail and describe it with great accuracy rarely. He was born into an atmosphere redolent with dissatisfaction of things as they were an atmosphere into which he infused his ardent belief that things could be bettered. In practice, therefore, he rejected the theory of Art for Art’s sake; for there is abundant evidence that he was supremely conscious of a mission and that he definitely started out in many of his novels to reform and to right the wrongs by means of subtle propaganda. He was a democrat with a passion for humanity.

Anand appears to be universal in respect of the lower classes only. Just as no writer before Dickens had handled the English people, similarly no
Indo-English writer before Anand had devoted so sustained and sympathetic an attention to the poor masses, outcastes and the neglected lot of the society.

In *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, Anand reveals the curse of untouchability, exploitation, child labor, social governance, social set up of society, customs, religion, belief, prejudices and the theme of the miserable masses is studied in both a rural and urban setting where hunger and starvation are caused by direct denial of their rightful due to the working class by the social system and the rulers. This is nothing but a reflection of the society. Both these novels deal with the theme of untouchability, exploitation, poverty, hunger and the suffering of the Indian masses. The theme of suffering caused by vicious circumstances in life has been realistically depicted, and the heroic struggle of the central figures, against heavy odds, raises the novels to the lofty heights of an epic.

*Untouchable* and *Coolie* are called epics of misery and social realism as they have all the qualities of great epics though in different ways. According to the ancient Greeks, the epic is a narrative poem, longer in scope and size, having a divine inspiration. The characters in an epic poem can be partly human and partly divine. In epics, the action should be complete and grand. An epic hero is not an ordinary person. *Untouchable* and *Coolie* have the same qualities of epics. Sharma quotes Francis H. Stoddard to say;

“A novel is a narrative of human life under the stress of emotion. It differs from the epic in that. It is a narration of human rather than super human life, under the stress of the ordinary rather than of excessive or heroic emotion”. (*I.D. Sharma, 67*).
In this sense, the modern novel is closer to the epic in its endeavour of portraying modern man’s predicament in a hostile environment. The novel tends to assume the form of an epic of common man in ordinary everyday life. It realistically describes the various aspects of life. In this sense, *Untouchable* has epic dimensions as it deals with the epic struggle of the Indian untouchable or the social backward class against the established social order. In *Coolie*, the life history of Munoo is the life history of starving millions of India who flee from pillar to post, and who are overworked and treated as beasts of burden; they die prematurely of hunger, suffering and disease. Munoo is a universal figure, a larger than life character, and one who represents the suffering and starving millions of India.

Like Dostoevsky’s “The Idiot”, Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Premchand’s *Godan*, Mulk Raj Anand has created a unique protagonist Bakha in *Untouchable* and Munoo in *Coolie*. In *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, Mulk Raj Anand presents the Indian downtrodden and labourers with their problems – social rejection, poverty, starvation, poor health, misery, death and humiliation. Anand’s immortal creation of the protagonist Bakha and Munoo represent Indian society. One finds that in Bakha’s life at each stage, tragedy deepens and intensifies, without any respite. Bakha is a poor untouchable, tradition-follower who is an idealist and so cannot think of going against society, religion, beliefs and the ‘agents’ of religious institutions.

Anand has taken the theme of his novels from real life and so his novel reflects nothing but social realism. He brought to fictional life Bakha, his boyhood companion, the untouchable Sweeper boy, in *Untouchable*. Anand's mother abused Bakha for 'polluting' her son when Bakha carried home a
bleeding Anand, hurt by a stone. Bakha is reviled by caste Hindus as he cleans latrines; but Anand, the writer, captures Bakha's pride in his work: he tackles his odious job with a conscientiousness that invests his movement with beauty. The novel was not only a powerful social tract, but a remarkable technical feat as in a single day’s action the author builds round his hero a spiritual crisis broad enough to embrace the whole of India. Forster wrote in his introduction: "It has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it. (ix).

Anand continued his interest in social themes with his next few novels dealing with the destiny of the working class in India. Coolie centered on Munoo, an orphan boy dying of tuberculosis brought on by malnutrition. It exposes the whole system through its victim's tale of exploitation. Even in the dreariest of the surroundings, the little hero retains his qualities of warm-heartedness, love, comradeship and curiosity. In The Village, inspired by the experience of his family whose land was taken away by the landlord of the village, the novelist explores the state of the poor peasantry under British rule.

The underdog protagonists Bakha and Munoo sail in the same boat as far as personal suffering is concerned. There is a similar central theme in Untouchable and Coolie social exploitation, the exploitation of the poor and the under-privileged by the forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. In Anand’s Coolie, Munoo is denied his fundamental right to life and happiness and is exploited and made to suffer, till he dies of consumption. The novelist makes it quite clear that Munoo is not the only victim of such exploitation. He represents millions of those for whom such exploitation and denial of life and happiness is the lot of everyday life. The lot of the poor is equally wretched and miserable whether in rural or urban India. Whether in a village like Bilaspur or
a small town like Sham Nagar or big cities like Daulatpur and Bombay the story of suffering is the same.

Such painful journey of Bakha and Munoo is a unique feature in the study of comparative aspects found beautifully woven in these extraordinary epics of misery by Anand. Both the novels have similarities in their social background, such as exploitation by landlords and masters, ill fate caused by surroundings, social beliefs, cumulative torture, unfulfilled desires in life. Yet the protagonists make a long painful journey in life with the hope of betterment and at last both Bakha and Munoo are crushed under the heavy burdens of life and get disintegrated into ashes with the so called pure and religious dust of mother India.

Mulk Raj Anand has presented the miserable condition of social by backward classes and of coolies in India. Both these novels have been written with a purpose. These novels are a powerful indictment of modern, capitalistic Indian society and of its feudal system with the shameless and tragic exploitation of the underdog and the poor. Both the protagonists want to live but the society does not allow them to do so. They die of exploitation, poverty and hunger. If the poor are treated humanely, most of the social problems can be solved easily. Humanism is the only solution to all the problems.

“The theme of the novel - untouchability itself is very realistic. *Untouchable* is a realistic novel of the socially crushed represented by the protagonist Bakha. It is a slice from a life without any modification. The novel begins with a realistic picture of the ‘outcastes’ colony. The local color of the novel is evoked with photographic realism and accuracy.” Anand describes, (Introduction, iv).
“The outcasts’ colony was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcasts from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, 146 horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes”. (*Untouchable*, 11).

This realistic description is what Anand himself has seen and presented as it is. This mode of realistic description continues throughout the novel. Anand has painted a real colony where untouchables and other outcaste people stay and wait to be humiliated by other caste Hindus. From the description in the novel, it looks as if Anand has spent a day with Bakha and observed it minutely. It is very much real and true. Bakha’s day starts as he writes;

“Bakha thought of the uncongeniality of his home as he lay half awake in the morning of an autumn day, covered by a worn-out, greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet, which was spread on the floor in a corner of the cave like, dingy, dank, one-roomed mud house. His sister slept on a cot next to him and his father and brother snored from under a patched, ocher-colored quilt, on a broken string bed, on the other side” (12).

This is the reality one can see inside the hut of an untouchable. Anand observes and presents a real photographic picture. Usually Bakha’s day starts with scolding from his father Lakha, the jamadar of all the sweepers in the town and the cantonment. Bakha dreams of having everything like Britishers.
Anand starts narrating Bakha’s desire to look like Britishers which is very much real to the colonial mind of Indian untouchable.

“Bakha had looked at the Tommies, stared at them with wonder and amazement when he first went to live at the British regimental barracks with his uncle. He had had glimpses, during his sojourn there, of the life the Tommies lived: sleeping on strange, low canvas beds covered tightly with blankets; eating eggs, drinking tea and wine in tin mugs; going to parade and then walking down to the bazaar with cigarettes in their mouths and small silver-mounted canes in their hands. And he had soon become possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life”. (13).

But it was a dream and desire very far from reality for Bakha. His day starts with the ‘rude bullying order to get up. “Get up, ohe you Bakhiya, ohe son of a pig!’ came his father’s voice, sure as the daylight, from the midst of a broken, jarring, interrupted snore. Get up and attend to the latrines or the sepoys will be angry. (15).

Anand has used such words which are very much real and by using an Indian tone, he wants to make it very realistic. Bakha is on duty to clean latrines. He is in charge of the three rows of public latrines which lined the extreme end of the colony. Anand observes;

“Men came one after another, towards the latrines. Most of them were Hindus, naked, except for the loin-cloth, brass jugs in hand and with the sacred thread twisted round their left ears. Occasionally came a Muhammadan, who wore a long, white cotton tunic and baggy trousers, holding a big copper kettle in his hand”. (20).
Bakha finishes his job and returns to his hut as he is thirsty and wants to drink water but finds only an empty pitcher. With no water for him to drink. Anand describes the problem of untouchability—the social curse. The caste people keep a safe physical distance with untouchable and treat them socially backward. Anand presents the real picture of the harsh reality and the curse of untouchability.

“He was overcome by the man’s kindness. He was grateful, Grateful, haltingly grateful, flatteringly grateful, stumblingly Grateful…” (21).

The water episode is very heart rending. Anand’s powerful observation, use of real and local language, use of abuses and the naked picture of the curse of untouchability clearly indicates social realism. Sohini is treated badly by a caste Hindu. She waits long for a chance to bring some caste Hindu to the well that gets her pitcher filled with water; untouchables don’t have their well. Anand writes;

“The outcasts were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own because it cost a lot of money to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulandshahr. 150 Percent they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindu’s well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers.” (26).
Such humiliation is common for untouchables and they have meekly accepted as it is an age old tradition. Even she waited for long to have her turn and other outcastes also waited, but they cannot touch the well, but have to wait for caste Hindus to give them water. Anand writes; “She had come as fast as she could to the well, full of fear and anxiety that she would have to wait her turn since she could see from a distance that there was already a crowd. She didn’t feel disappointed so much as depressed to realize that she would be the eleventh to receive water. She had sensed the feeling in her brother’s soul. He was tired. He was thirsty. She had felt like a mother as she issued from her home to fetch water, a mother going out to fetch food and drink for her loved ones at home. Now as she sat in a row with her fellow sufferers, her heart sank. There was no sign of anyone passing that way that could be a possible benefactor”. (27).

This realistic picture is on the one hand appreciated for Anand’s art of narration and on the other hand makes us grow compassionate with the untouchables. Gulaboo, the washerwoman being jealous of Sohini abuses her:

“Think of it! Think of it! Bitch! Prostitute! Wanton! And your mother hardly dead. Think of laughing on my face, laughing at me who am old enough to be your mother. Bitch!’ the washerwoman exploded…‘Ari, bitch! Do you take me for a buffoon? What are you laughing at, slut? Aren’t you ashamed of showing your teeth to me in the presence of men, prostitute?” (28-29).

Such treatment with outcaste people was common in the early decades of the twentieth century in India. This is the reality and Anand has depicted it as it is in his novel.
Anand also threw light on the hypocrisy and lustfulness of the pretentious priest Pt. Kalinath who believes to have been polluted by the touch of untouchable. He, however, has a strong sexual desire for Sohini, an untouchable. This duality and hypocrisy is well revealed by Anand in the novel. He is ‘one of the priests in-charge of the temple in the town’. He is attracted by Sohini’s ‘fresh, young form whose full breast with their dark beads of nipples stood out so conspicuously under her muslin shirt’. It is his evil intention that urges him to ask Sohini to come to clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. Sohini innocently goes to do so and he tries to molest her, but she refuses to comply with his suggestions. He then raises an alarm shouting:

‘Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!’ His fellow Brahmins together shouted in a loud voice “Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purification ceremony”. (69).

Anand has always responded very sensitively to the many social issues affecting Indian society. Anand has felt concerned with all those countless millions of Indian society who have been oppressed, repressed, dispossessed, disinherited, defrauded, downtrodden, discriminated and dehumanized in the name of caste, class, religion, race, etc.

When Anand accidentally fell upon Marx’s “Letters on India,” his reading of the letters revolutionized his thinking completely. They “clarified and extended” his “half-formed thoughts”. Then onwards the Marxist creed appealed to him because it seemed to offer “an explanation of, and a solution to, the sufferings of his fellow men.”
The pre independent underlined loyalty for Gandhism is exploded with the contemporary critical insights. Out and out Dalit literary explosions like Narendra Jadhav’s ‘Outcaste’, Sharan Kumar Limbale’s ‘Outcaste’, Joseph Mewan’s ‘The Step Child’ etc., have questioned the textual politics of Anand’s novels. Among all the works that Anand has written Untouchable and Coolie stand apart and Anand’s significance mostly rests on these two novels.

The second select writer is Narendra Jadhav. His Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Escape from India’s Caste System offers a powerful narration of the plight of the untouchables in free India. It is a worthwhile chronicle of a historic battle against oppression. The novel opens with these remarks:

“Every sixth human being in the world today is an Indian, and every sixth Indian is an erstwhile untouchable, a Dalit. Today there are 165 million Dalits...and they continue to suffer under India’s 3,500-year-old caste system, which remains a stigma on humanity.” (Untouchables, 1).

Jadhav’s Untouchables is a multilayered personalized saga of the social transformation of Dalits in India. At one level, it is a loving tribute from a son to his father; at another, it gives an intelligent appraisal of the caste system in India and traces the story of the awakening of Dalits traversing three generations. At yet another level, it is reflective of the aspirations of millions of Dalits in India.

Untouchables is the story of a Dalit (untouchable) family’s struggle, and of its steady march forward and of upward social mobility inspired by Dr.Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who touched the lives of millions of Dalits.
Damu (Deodar) Runjaji Jadhav was just one of them. The author’s father, Damu was an ordinary man who did an extraordinary thing. He stood up against the oppression of the caste system by teaching his children to believe in themselves and reclaim their human dignity. Damu’s response to Ambedkar’s call to Dalits to “Educate, Unite and Agitate” is too complete and all-consuming to allow him to live in the past bearing the caste Hindus’ injustices.

Damu comes to Mumbai to escape from the tyranny of the upper castes in his native village Ozar, in Nashik District of Maharashtra. His struggle for survival and his transformation under the guidance of Dr. Ambedkar, from servility to awakened self-consciousness, is the main theme of this book. Damu was not a born leader, nor did he ever become one. But he had one exception, he chose to rebel against the prevailing caste system to create his own destiny. “Sonu says, Do you know what the upper caste say when they throw the balota? Aamcha anna ghe. Aamchi eeda ghe. Aamchi peeda ghe.’ ” (Take all our evils away as you take this food. Go, take the food away…better in your stomach than in the garbage, if you will take our perils with it.) “we would probably treat dogs with more dignity.” (31).

An intelligent man, with no formal education, he worked hard to be allowed to live with dignity. Damu is abused and severely beaten up by upper-caste people in his village, for refusing to take out a putrefied body from out of a well. His forefathers were required to wear clay-pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.

The simplicity of the narrative brings out the misery in the story and triumph of Damu’s family describing various landmarks like, a radical transformation in Damu and his family under the spell of Dr. Ambedkar, their
sloughing off of servility and realization of their self-esteem and finally their empowerment through education.

Narendra Jadhav’s *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Escape from India’s Caste System* is selected for analysis as Damu’s story differs from those of Indian Dalit autobiographies which revisit and relive the horrors of untouchability without going beyond, whereas Narendra Jadhav represents a part of an awakened and educated Dalit community, focusing on his community’s past, which is not found in written histories. In the process of unearthing the hidden histories of a Dalit community, *Untouchables* focuses on the Dalits’ struggle to find a way out of their suffocated lives under the caste ridden social system.

One may say that as long as rewriting strategies in postmodern and postcolonial literature draw our attention to the potential of debunking the hegemonies of privileged classes, they do have a value and continue to attract the attention of the critiques. These rewritings tickle the imagination of the postmodern writers and force the readers to examine and force certain paradigm shifts.

Literature is expected to not only tell us about the existing world, but also to show the reader the ways to change himself and adapt to the changes in the world. Besides sharing knowledge, some books put forward some issues for discussion. From creating natural characters and narrating real life incidents which have been part and parcel of Indian society, Narendra Jadhav’s ‘Outcaste’ does really inspire many and sees many facets in this broad society. In this book Jadhav recollects his father’s words when he was leaving for America for studies, Damu, Narendra Jadhav’s father said, their ancestors had
never crossed the boundaries of their little village in India … And today his son was all set to cross the seven seas.

This statement almost tells the gist of the book *Outcaste* by Narendra Jadhav. Actually the book is about the journey of a Dalit family from a small village, Ozar, to a big city Mumbai, and from there to far off places like the USA. It tells the story of a Dalit family. It describes the oppressive and exploitative village life and the successful flight of three generations of a family. The central theme follows the successful transformation of this family into an extremely popular family producing eminent scholars and great officers inside and outside the country – all in a span of three generations. “Outcaste” represents Dalits’ life in the global space. Jadhav rightly claims that it is also a story of the social transformation of India.

*Outcaste* has attracted wide critical acclaim of readers from all over the world. It was first published in Marathi in 1993 and was highly successful and was appreciated a lot. Commenting on the changes in the English version, the author says, I wrote this book during my stay in Washington D.C. for four years, with a global reader in mind. That is precisely why the social context, which was implicit in the Marathi book, has been fully spelt out in the English Version. While the early Dalit writers described the insults and the indignities with hysterical rage, Jadhav records the same experiences with a sense of restraint. In a review in “The Hindu”, Shanta Gokhale makes a similar comment:

“Damu’s story differs also from those Dalit autobiographies which revisit and relive the horrors of untouchability without going beyond …. It is about his pride in his work, about stretching himself to the utmost to
achieve perfection in everything he does, about the despair of not finding work, but also about his determination to forge for his children a destiny that was never, ordained’. (Forging one’s Own Destiny, iii).

The early Dalit writers revisit and relive the horrors of untouchability.’ But Jadhav records ‘the horrors of untouchability as a past memory. He optimistically focuses on the vision of the future of the Dalit Community. Jadhav also describes the life of Mahars in the village in a detailed way. In these Mahars appear as victims of inhuman traditions.

Jadhav selects some events to explain violations of human rights of Dalits, For example, Damu’s childhood memories of leaving for Mumbai from his village. He realizes that his children would never enjoy the village life. For their future he takes the decision. He describes the village also in a concise way. Here is the description, In their village, the untouchable castes included mainly the Mahar, Chamber, Dhor and many.

As elsewhere, here to each caste had its own heredity, communal duty as Occupation, Chambhars and Dhors processed raw hides of animals and made them into shoes and others leather products. Mangs twisted hemp into ropes and made baskets. “We, Mahars, on the other hand, had a traditional place in the community as village servants. Those who did not have traditional duties survived on odd jobs at the mercy of the high castes.” (36).

It is also told that in each Maharvada there will be a chavdi-a-village hall – and a meeting place. There will be one temple where Goddess Mariaai is worshipped. The other temple was temple was that of Hanuman, which was not open to the Mahars at all.
In _Outcaste_ the representation of village life stands for the national life. Mumbai is a cosmopolitan city and we do not find caste discrimination there. Even Jadhav, when he comes to his village, is treated as an untouchable. The reflection of village life is crucial for the representation of Dalit human rights. Jadhav repeatedly refers to this village life to mark the backwardness of India in his interviews on the radio. In Sociology, the village stands for the nation. As the doyen of Indian Sociology, M.N. Srinivas puts it:

“It is well to remember here that in spite of its enormous diversity… India is one culture and this is visible in every village.” (Village Studies, _Participant Observations and Social Science Research in India_. 566).

Jadhav’s representation of Ambedkar and of his struggle in _Outcaste_ is a parallel theme of the representation of the city as a space of freedom. Jadhav suggests repeatedly that the social mobility of his family is possible because of the migration to Mumbai and their participation in Babasaheb Ambedkar’s struggle. He contrasts Ozar as a place of “Inhuman traditions” with Mumbai “a heaven.” Looking at the pictures Tulsimmbaba brought from big cities, Damu says:

“The pictures took us to a very different world. There were so many new sights from Mumbai-wide Streets, high-rise buildings, rains, planes, and big steamer ships. We believed that these places must be the heaven that people described.” (Outcaste : A Memoir, 63).

Mumbai is a powerful symbol of ‘freedom’ in _Outcaste_. As a colonial city, it provided a lot of job opportunities to the poor from the villages and also
anonymity to the untouchables, Mumbai was a centre of the Dalit movement spearheaded by Babasaheb Ambedkar. Jadhav locates the shaping of a new identity for Mahars in colonial Mumbai in the context of the Dalit movement. He writes:

“He (Damu) had worked in Mumbai for several years and the city had brought touchability into his life, along with an awareness of his rights as a human being. As a participant in the Babasaheb Ambedkar’s social movement, he was reluctant to perform yaskar duties.” (6).

In this story of historical processes, the migration of Damu from his village to the urban space, Mumbai, and the Dalit movement are central to the making of modern Dalits. Damu is presented as a representative of the modern Dalits. First, the reader examines the public spaces available to the Mahars in colonial Mumbai. Second, he analyses the representation of Damu and Ambedkar-led Dalit movement as a site of the new Dalit identity. Damu comes to Mumbai for the first time in 1919 at the age of 12. He visits several places in the city without experiencing any form of caste discrimination. “In our village, I could not have entered a tea shop without being identified as a Mahar, and would surely have been driven out instantly”. (89); Gora Saheb treated him as a human being and he was able to get odd jobs like selling newspaper and working as a construction labourer or in the factories. The author repeatedly reminds the reader that the city is a better place for Mahars than the village. Describing the celebration of the Ganapati festival in Mumbai and the attack of the upper castes on the procession, Sonu asserts, “We won’t let them bully us in Mumbai. This is a big city, not a village.” (120).
Both Damu and Sonu are aware of Ambedkar’s struggle for untouchables in this period. Damu was dismissed from GIP Railways for participating in a strike around 1929. He reluctantly accepted the Yeskar duty in his village out of desperation. After a few months of duty, Damu escapes from his village along with his wife Sonu. They become Dalits in Mumbai with their participation in the Ambedkarite social movement. As Sonu puts it:

“Truly, we sensed a change in the way we carried ourselves. We proudly proclaimed ourselves Dalits, with our chin up and we looked everyone in the eye. We began to lose our former servility, associated with being born in a low caste.” (178).

This “change” is what Jadhav calls “enormous social transformation.” The Mahars transform themselves into “Dalits.” Jadhav devotes the second section of his book titled “The Struggle” to narrate the story of the Ambedkarite social movement and the transformation of Damu the Mahar into a Dalit and a Buddhist.

This explains the close examination of the representation of Ambedkar and Damu, out of their relationship in the text. Jadhav’s ‘objective’ history of the Dalit movement draws on existing academic studies, yes it is, I suggest, a new model of history that reinscribes known events into a global logic in the current context of neo-liberal expansion. Jadhav represents Ambedkar thus: Ambedkar was an American educated scholar, a former untouchable with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, a Masters in Economics and Doctor of Science from London. He thought that education is really the way out for Dalits. “He dominated India’s life from 1924-1956.”
The key aspect of this version of Ambedkar is that it locates the roots of Ambedkar’s rebellion in his western education. He is also a messiah who guides the Dalits in all the agitations. According to Jadhav, during the Mahad Satyagraha and the other struggles, Ambedkar literally controls the entire activities of the Dalits.

Ambedkar’s elevation to the status of a “saviour” and the symbol of self-respect, dignity and equality, is directly related to the portrayal of Damu as an independent and assertive Dalit character. Damu says that Ambedkar inculcated “the flame of dignity” and “self-respect,” in him during the Mahad Satyagraha. Damu attributes his assertive and rebellious nature to Ambedkar:

“The movement inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar had fully seeped into me. I was now imbued with new courage and self-realization. It had given me the power to question, reason and act.”(25).

“Self-realization” It would seem here, is the most important contribution of the Ambedkarite movement. Because of Ambedkar, Damu realizes that he is a human being. He imbibes “the power to question, reason and act” in the course of his participation in the Dalit movement. In other words, the principal contribution of the Ambedkarite movement is regarded as the making of self-assertive individuals like Damu. Furthermore, Damu’s ‘self-realization” that he is a human being and that he cannot be treated like an animal and his self-representation of himself as a Dalit and neo-Buddhist is staged as the crucial moment in the transformation of his family into an upper middle class family in a span of three generations. As Damu puts it, ‘circumstances brought us to Mumbai, and that city brought Babasaheb into our lives. He changed our lives and those of millions forever”. It is colonial
Jadhav highlights the struggle, agony, depression and the determination of Damu in his struggle for survival in Mumbai. Damu survives through the Great Depression in the 1930s. He participates in all the major agitations led by Ambedkar while working hard to bring up his family. Through his struggle for survival in Mumbai and through his participation in the Ambedkarite movement, Damu evolves as a distinct individual. In his “Authors note,” Jadhav describes Damu, the central character of his memoir, in these words:

“Damu was not a leader…but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny. Damu had no formal education…yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence. Damu was not a guru…but he taught his children to believe in themselves and reclaim human dignity. Damu was often humbled…yet he maintained, ‘Goats are sacrificial offerings, not lions’. Damu was an ordinary man, they said…but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system.” (xi-xii).

In this view, Damu is a rebel against ‘the caste system’ who shaped his own destiny and that of his children through education. He believed in himself and declared that he is the master of his own will. What is striking here is the transformation of Damu into an autonomous individual who carved out of a life of his own. We see that Damu is different from other Mahars. In the very first scene of the text, we meet a Damu who thinks very differently from...
the other Mahars about the Yeskar duty. “They are told ‘he (Damu) was not willing to conform to tradition” (122). Damu and Sonu Continue to shape their modern Dalit identity and reassert their humanity through their participation in Ambedkar’s social movement. They meticulously practise Babasaheb’s teachings on many aspects of life including cleanliness and grooming. The transformation of Damu’s family is complete when it acquires education and middle class values. Note Sonu’s words:

“We began to bathe daily and dress neatly with freshly washed clothes and tie our hair into a neat bun. We kept our house immaculately clean with all the brass pots and pans polished and shining.” (178).

Jadhav’s family evolves into a new middle class family and becomes part of the global middle class in the 1990s. His mobility from Mumbai, the financial capital of India and a metropolitan city, to Washington, D.C., the U.S.A. a cosmopolitan city is suggestive of the transformation of the Mahar family into an urban middle class one. What one should not miss here is the context of liberalization of Indian Economy in the 1990s.

Jadhav’s “mobility” is closely linked to the liberalization of Indian economy, i.e., making India part of the processes of globalization. As is well-known, this required various forms of structural adjustment, including a subjective transformation from what is depicted as dependence to self-reliance and self-help. I am emphasizing the significance of the opening up of new institutional spaces and the emergence of “a new geography of centrality” that connects major international financial centers like Mumbai and Washington, D.C. It is in the context of globalization, and the restructuring of the Indian economy, that Jadhav configures the spatial hierarchies in his Outcaste. While
the village is the centre of the nation in the national order, the city is the centre of the global order of the 1990s. This reorganizing of the spatial hierarchies of the local, national and global is crucial for an analytic understanding of the “transnational identity” that Jadhav constructs in Outcaste. The reflection of village as a centre of “inhuman traditions” and of the city as a space of “touchability” is the recurrent theme of the text. It is in Mumbai that Damu and Sonu reject their ascribed identities as Mahars/untouchables and assert their new identity as Dalits/neo-Buddhists.

In the presentation of village life, the narrative viewpoint is that of an outsider’s of an urban middle class individual who is not familiar with village life or with the Mahar world. This narrator’s perspective is informed by a certain notion of universal human rights. This is evident in the repeated comparison between “the animal” and “the human,” as well as in the sense that this humanity is somehow “natural,” something inherent in some people. What is stressed in Outcaste is the “humanness” of untouchable Mahars and their right to demand dignity and equality.

The narrative of Dalit human rights violations is addressed to the global readers and institutions. The notion of “human rights” is not linked in the citizenship of a nation. In other words, Jadhav’s notion of human rights discourse is a moral discourse that invokes the neutrality and moral authority of global civil society.

Let us turn to a close reading of the text. The last section of the book portrays the successful and happy second generation of the Dalit family. Jadhav tells us that his family consists of “Grandma, Dada, Bai, four brothers and two sisters. Janu, the eldest, was born in 1938, and then followed Sudha, Dina, Leela, Trusha and I. I was born in 1953. All of us were three years apart. Being
the youngest, I was nicknamed “Chhotu”-little one” (218). Jadhav’s brother Janu was selected for the IAS in 1963. He later occupies the post of principal secretary to Government of Maharastra. Narendra Jadhav himself is a distinguished economist in the Reserve Bank of India, Mumbai.

Jadhav describes himself as “the English-speaking professional from the Reserve Bank of India had given way to the native Dhurva” (206). He married Vasundhara, a woman from ‘a higher caste’. He is known for his rationalism and modern views. One sees Jadhav and his entire family members along with some relatives in Mumbai International Airport. The date was 22 December 1997. When Jadhav was leaving for Washington D.C. to join in the International Monetary Fund, We see Jadhav’s old mother and his entire family. As Jadhav reports:

“My brothers were there; so were my sisters-in-law with the third generation of Jadhav’s in various age groups. Then there were my two sisters with their families. Several relatives and family friends were also there. All of them were sad at the separation, and looking at them, even my wife Vasundara had tears in her eyes though she was going to join me In Washington, D.C. without the two children shortly.” (205).

It is crucial to note that Jadhav shows us his family in the international Airport in the context of his appointment in the international financial institution. IMF. Jadhav’s mobility in the society as a member of English educated, professional middle class is an indication that he is able to acquire a new identity through his achievements. Jadhav’s cosmopolitan Dalit identity draws on the suffering, joys and failures and the struggles of the
untouchable Mahars. What is distinctive about this identity is that it articulates a new relationship between the untouchable community and the individual.

Critics have argued that Dalit self-narratives link the individual to his community as “a way of gaining power and support in a group struggle against oppression”. (Sarah Beth, Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: the Transformation of Pain into Resistance) While this is certainly true of many Dalit autobiographies/self-narratives, Outcaste proposes delinking the individual from the community as a possible way out of caste oppression.

Marati Dalit literature presents the transformation of Mahars into a new community called “Dalits”. The category of “Dalit” is a political identity based on the collective experience of pain and suffering of the untouchable communities. It is constructed as an identity of self-pride and resistance. In Dangle “We notice that Dalit writers portray the experiences and the struggles of the untouchable communities in Dalit literary texts in the 1970s and 1980s. (Poisoned Breath: 231) In Sharan Kurnar Limbales’s autobiography Akkarmashi, the violence involved in Dalit experience and its importance in the construction of Dalit identity is presented. Limbale, who was born to a Mahar mother and father a Patil, decides to discuss his life story publicly to argue that he cannot be dubbed as ‘a bastard’ and his mother not ‘a whore.’

Drawing on Ambedkar’s struggles and insights on the caste society, Limbale criticizes the caste Hindu society for making his mother a victim. Through his writings, he negotiates his identity, reinvents himself as a Dalit and reconnects himself to the community. Similarly, Bama, in her Karakku, narrates how she joins a Christian convent and becomes a nun, but returns to the Dalit community after she realizes that her Christian identity is not a liberating identity (Bama). Both Akkarmashi and Karkku speak for an
emerging consciousness and are addressed to the upper castes in their villages and in the country. These texts stage the conflict between the upper castes and the untouchables as one of “the central concerns and demonstrate the unmarked Indian modern as upper caste identity in the Indian public sphere.” (Pandian, 17,38).

Jadhav’s middle class identity differentiates his relatives from the village. In the airport, Jadhav, looking at his relatives who were addressed in their frayed arid yellowed traditional garb feels:

‘These people, raw, down-to-earth, unpolished, are the ones to whom I belong,’ I thought. Born in the confines of poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, they were at different stages of their struggle in life. ‘But they are my people,’ I thought, with a sense of belonging, as they looked at me with awe. In their eyes, I had managed, through hard work and perseverance, to climb out of the morass of untouchability, illiteracy and backwardness.” (Outcaste: A Memoir, 206).

The relatives represent the Mahar community who are at different stages in their life. Jadhav stands out as a successful person who “managed” to get out of the oppressive conditions of Mahar life. It is important for Jadhav and Apoorva to acknowledge that they “belong” to the Mahar community and yet to distinguish themselves from the community. We notice very striking nostalgic references to the Mahar community. We also observe a total absence of pride in the caste identity and culture of the community unlike the early Dalit autobiographies, which celebrate Dalit life and own up to caste identities as Dalit identities. Outcaste argues for a universal identity. Let me quote Jadhav’s self-description to make this point clearer:
“Yes, I do come from the Mahar caste. Yes, my father was an illiterate lowly employee doing mental jobs to earn a square meal for the family, Yes, my forefathers were required to wear clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground and the brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.’ Yes, as village servants, my forefathers were mercilessly forced to run... human pilots, foaming at the mouth under the scorching sun, to herald the carriages of government officials. So what? Have I not reclaimed my dignity through my achievements? Why should the caste into which I was born count now? (207).

Jadhav is agonized by the fact that he is judged on the basis of his origins. He feels that his caste background should be treated as his past and he should be accepted as he is. He recollects how an old man from his village, his high-caste school teacher and well-educated neighbor, reminds him that he is from a Mahar caste. Remembering the scene of his visit to the shrine of Vithoba at the famous temple in Pandharpur and his reception as a VIP by the priests, Jadhav becomes very emotional hugging the boulder in front of the temple, the boundary beyond which his untouchable forefathers were not allowed. He resolves his “agitation” within his mind by realizing that he has crossed the boundaries of caste. In Jadhav’s words, “I had crossed the caste lines. I had beaten the system” (213). He further explains,

“If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is their problem, not mine, I certainly don’t need to torment myself over it. I pity them, for they are the victims for their own obsolete prejudices...Dignity, after all, rests in the
mind and heart...and soul. I have to reclaim it not from outside, but from within. And for that, I must cut off the albatross of the caste system from my soul, once and for all…” (214).

Jadhav feels that he crossed “the caste lines” through his achievements. We must pay close attention to two aspects of Jadhav’s narration of his success story. One is the description of the caste system in terms of untouchability and caste-based menial jobs. The other is the assertion of individual autonomy through his newly acquired international middle class identity. Jadhav’s construction of certain caste practices as untouchability is similar to the discursive strategy of essentialization of untouchability in Dalit discourses on caste. Jadhav represents himself as a deracinated individual self in his desire for freedom from caste. He insists on the capacity to realize his desire to become a global citizen. Jadhav’s desire for “self-realization” and his identification with a cosmopolitan ideal sets himself as a distinct individual in contrast to his relatives and Dalits in the village.

The implications of Jadhav’s identity claims are clear if we read an Apoorva’s declaration. Studying in Maryland in USA, Apoorva Jadhav’s daughter says:

“Now, I think I know who I am. I am just Apoorva, not tied down by race, religion or caste. My ancestors carried the burden of being a Dalit and bowing down to demeaning tasks even after India’s Independence. I have the torch they have lit for me and nothing can stop me.” (Outcaste: A Memoir, 263).
Apoorva’s identity is something new. She is just herself: Apoorva. Claiming a Dalit identity is a burden that she does not want to carry. She would acknowledge that it was an identity of her ancestors, but she may not want to call upon that identity for her self-representation. The Former editor of “Times of India” and a columnist Dileep Padagaonkar declares her identity as an emancipator identity. “His young Apoorva, Jadhav’s doting daughter, reveals in the epilogue what emancipation truly means: it does not matter one whit to her that tag or to suppress it. She has become what her forebears have always aspired to be: just normal people who are neither aggressive nor apologetic about their identity”.

The untouchable Mahar family, in a span of three generations, becomes “normal people”. This is a claim that Jadhav makes repeatedly in the book and in his interviews. He insists that the process of globalization and the new partiality it represents is central to this transformation of untouchables into “normal people”. I have termed this transnational-identity “cosmopolitan Dalit identity”. Jadhav repeatedly refers to his past; his village and his caste identity as a burden that he needs to throw out to become a modern person. In a radio talk, he says, ‘I am not able to throw off the baggage of the past. I carry that baggage. My daughter is able to throw off the baggage. If someone looks down at her, my daughter would say, it is his problem, not my problem.’ Jadhav’s desire for a democratic society and a liberating identity is hued on his notion of an individual who is able to move beyond the village and the nation through education and through social struggles. His global identity is not a result of the breaking down the “traditional” caste identities and forms of untouchability. It is formed as a contrast to the refined Mahar identity.
The insertion of the local Mahar identity and the national Dalit identity into the global Dalit identity is a process that is at work in “Outcaste”. This global Dalit identity acknowledges its past—its “descent,” but easily merges into a certain kind of American multicultural identity. As a consequence, the new global identity reproduces Mahar identity as caste Identity and village culture as Indian tradition in the new hierarchy of identities, the cosmopolitan identity of Apoorva stands for a universal identity.

The third select writer is Mahaswetha Devi. She sincerely believes that “a responsible writer, standing at a turning point in history, has to take a stand in defence of the exploited. As she happens to consider women as one group among the exploited and under subjugation, Mahasweta Devi’s writings provide scope for viewing her work from the feminist angle mothers bear the brunt of social and political oppression and endure and later offer resistance with an indomitable will and it is these that dominate her writings.

Though set against the backdrop of the climatic phase of the annihilation of the urban Naxalites and its aftermath, the play *Mother of 1084* is a moving story of a mother, apathetic, apolitical and pathetically ignorant of her own son’s ideals. The protagonist Sujatha is a witness to the suppression of the Naxalite Movement in which her own son, Brati, the corpse No.1084 had taken part and became a martyr.

The play begins with a phone call from the Government Morgue asking Sujata to identify a corpse, of Number 1084; that of her own favorite son, Brati. Realizing in no time that she is alone in her concern for her son, she goes to the government morgue against the wishes of her corrupt husband and children who are keen on hushing up the whole affair. Sujata’s physical
identification of Brati triggers off a process of awakening in her and ends up with her ‘discovery’ of her son.

Through the character of Sujata, Mahasweta Devi seeks to bring to light the darker areas of life where persecution of the innocent continues unabated. She is one of those victims whose kith and kin had been done away with as a result of confrontation with the people in power. Sujata is a middle-class woman, a sensitive wife and a loving mother but a stranger in her own household that has reduced her to an insignificant cog. Brati, her younger son is her only favourite, for he is a man of integrity and convictions. But tragically enough, Sujata realizes only after though soon after his death that he remained a complete stranger to her all these days. It comes as a surprise to her, who nursed an innate resentment against the patriarchal order that she had failed to recognize the rising tide of revolt in Brati.

Sujata finds herself caught in a web—a conflict between a sympathetic mother and a silent protestor against the immoral tendencies of the members of her family. The conflict assumes a new form when she encounters cold indifference from the family at the news of Brati’s death with which the play actually begins. Sujata feels suffocated under the weight of the stifling values enjoined on her by the patriarchal society. At the same time she does not venture to disentangle herself from those values. Though she is aware of her husband’s womanizing and other vices, she does not protest against them but just seeks an escape by taking up a job in a bank. She continues to discharge her familial duties bearing calmly all kinds of humiliation.

Sujata feels very bitter and guilty for not having understood or known her son. She decides to conduct a quest for the discovery of truth about her son which ends up as a self-discovery. She arrives at this discovery through a series
of encounters and meetings with people beyond her circuit of experience. Through them, she intends to forge a connection with Brati or with what he strove and died for. She visualizes in Brati’s revolt, an articulation of the silent resentment she has carried against the members of her family and the values or the lack of values, they stood for within herself.

Sujata’s meeting with the mother of Somu, one of the fellow activists of Brati, brings her face to face with the baffling reality when she says: “I lost my son, my son’s father, and I, with this tortoise’s life of mine shall live on forever, the two funeral pyres burning within.” (17) The reference to a ‘tortoise’s life’ hints at the self-protective and sheltered life which the woman needs to outgrow. In the suffering of the members of Somu’s family Sujata could hear an echo of her own silent scream of torment and desperation.

Sujata’s meeting with Nandini, an activist and a faithful follower of Brati provides her with an insight into a part of her son’s life that she had never before known. She also learns that Brati, as a true rebel, did not allow his familial sentiments to prevail upon his revolutionary fervor and hence had not revealed his true self to Sujata.

Sujata’s visits to these people bring her in confrontation with certain secret areas of understanding and awareness. When Nandini says: It’s a deadly crime when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to everyone. It’s a crime to allow this to persist. It’s an obligation these days to know one’s son.

Sujata realizes that by not trying to forge a relationship with Brati, she had unwittingly become part of a complacent and selfish society. Sujata also becomes aware that but for Brati’s decision to honour his mother’s
sentiments on his birthday, which also becomes the day of his death, her son would have escaped death. Nandini’s words awaken her consciousness. Sujata blames herself for not paying any heed to Brati’s revolt against the age-old social values and for being ignorant of her own fault. Thus in the company of Nandini, the crippled girl who is nearly blinded by the police, and who continues to cherish hopes in human dignity, Sujata’s true self is unveiled. However finding in her a rebel in the making, the vested interests chain her and make her continue in her complacency.

Nandini shouts at her. It is Nandini who induces a much needed shock in Sujata that is necessary to awaken her from this state of stupor. How can you be so smug and complacent? With so many young-men killed, so many imprisoned, how can you wallow in your complacency? It’s all your ‘all’s right with the world, let’s go on nicely’ that frightens me most.

She tells Sujata not to visit her for it was not going to result in anything. Though transplanted in the Indian soil, in the context of women’s quest for assertion, the fight against apathy and complacency is, in a broader sense, the Arnoldian battle cry against philistinism. I won’t go to Somu’s mother again I won’t come to you. I won’t go to the places where Brati exists. May be that’s my punishment for not knowing Brati.

But as the play progresses Sujata’s identification with Brati becomes total and on the other hand, the rift between her and her husband becomes unbridgeable. Her discovery of Brati and his cause helps her rediscover herself and her cause as a mother, a woman, and above all, a human being. Her husband’s accusation that she is responsible for Brati’s death accelerates the process of her recognition of her ideological moorings. She now feels relieved of the burden of guilt she has all along been bearing. The play ends with Sujata
breaking down at her daughter’s engagement party, passionately exhorting the audience not to be silent sufferers but respond actively to social reality. She lashes out at the police and then the brutally complacent and ignorant people of richer or rather upper middle class people that have lately come into being. Addressing the audience she says: Why don’t speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Speak!...Let it tear down the happiness of every one cooped up in his own happy happiness.

Sujata’s voice comes out as a universal protest against the heartless society in which we all live. From silent suffering and a sense of imprisoned guilt within, Sujata moves in the direction of issuing a clarion call to women in society to awake and arise or be forever fallen. Through a direct address to the audience i.e., from a plane of the theatre as illusion to the theatre as a message giving social reality, Sujata communicates to the audience her transformation and the intended transformation to be brought about in society.

Though she collapses at the end of her exhortation, Sujata’s quest for Brati and his ideals and through this a quest for knowledge about the plight of the women has been communicated, ironically not through the devices of the theatre but through an extra theatrical spectacle. Hasn’t Murder in the Cathedral affected this in the Knights’ apologia and in the choric passages?.

Mahasweta Devi’s Outcast: Four Stories is a treatise on the pathetic doom of four marginalized women characters-Dhouli, Shanichari, Josmina and Chinta who are doubly wronged by being marginalized even by those marginalized in society. In these stories, Mahasweta Devi actually envisages a three-tier hierarchical structure in the Indian social order composed of the rungs of the non-marginalized or the mainstream, the marginalized or the subordinated, and finally the outcast or the marginalized by the marginalized. I
believe that it is Mahasweta Devi’s intention in these stories to excavate and exhibit the gender causes lying underneath the socio-political and economic exploitation of three women belonging to a backward minority.

The writer reveals the virtual slave trade that festers under the facade of the democratic society of India, and clearly indicates the plight of these women who usually have no one to turn to, nothing to look forward to, and have only a few to lend them a voice—women who are regarded as sub-human and treated as commodities both without and within their own communities.

The first of these stories, eponymously titled “dhouli” (note the translator’s ironic intent in using the first letter of the title in the lower case), presents the sad plight of a dusad (untouchable, lower caste) young widow who is seduced and impregnated by Misrilal, the son of a wealthy, upper-caste Brahman named Hanumanji Misra. Misrilal gets rid of the responsibility of the newborn child and its mother by marrying another woman belonging to his own caste and by settling in Ranchi, a distant Indian city. When Dhouli begins to sell her body in order to earn bread for her son and for her, Misrilal returns and becomes instrumental in forcing her to leave her village and move to the city to become a prostitute.

In Mahasweta Devi’s second story, “Shanichari,” an Oraon girl is marginalized like Dhouli in her own society for coming back with a Diku’s child in her womb. A middle-aged woman, Gohuman, has sold Shanichari to a brickkiln owner in Barasat, West Bengal, where she faces economic and sexual exploitation leading to pregnancy. Subsequently, Shanichari is sent back to her native village, but only to face ostracism.
Somewhat differently, however, in the story, “The Fairytale of Rajabasha,” a self-imposed ostracism, not from her own society, but from the world, is the consequence of the love of Josmina for her husband Sarjom. Both of them are sold to a landowner in the far-away Indian state of Punjab, where Josmina faces the same treatment as Shanichari, even though she eventually manages to come back home with the prospect of beginning life afresh. But this bright vision of hope turns out to be a hallucination, as she develops the symptoms of motherhood, a condition forced upon her by her master in Punjab. In the end, to save her beloved husband from being ostracized from his own community, Josmina commits suicide.

Dissimilar as these characters and their stories seem to be, what brackets these three characters together is the label of “Otherness” that sticks to their existence. It is interesting to note that this leitmotif of “Otherness” is recreated in the narrative mode of the three stories at different levels. The very opening paragraph of “Dhouli,” for instance, creates an ambience of an “Other world,” the world of the subaltern where no light can ever penetrate: “The bus left Ranchi in the evening and reached Taharr around eight at night. […] The world beyond and the wide, metalled road ended here. Rohtagi Company’s bus was the only link between Taharr and the rest of the world. […] They used poor, rundown buses for poor, rundown places like Taharr, Palani or Burudiha. The service was suspended during the rainy season as buses couldn’t play on unmetalled roads. Taharr would be completely cut off from the rest of the world during the monsoon months”. (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics. 9).

An ambience of marginalization, which is intensified later on, is suggested by the use of words like “poor, rundown buses for poor, run down
people.” At another level, too, the word “buses,” a clear signifier of modern lifestyle and civilization, fixes the nature and role of the people of the “Other world” as these buses are explicitly defined as rejected vehicles fit only to play to a world where the “metalled road ends.”

In total dissonance from the reference to the civilized world in the opening paragraph, the concluding paragraph of “dhouli” signifies another frame of marginalization. Here Mahasweta Devi delineates the natural world and thereby ironically affects dissolution of the nature-civilization dichotomy:

“The Sun shone brightly. The sky looked blue and the trees as green as always. She realized that nature was unaffected by the upheaval in her life. This painful thought made her weep. Wasn’t everything supposed to change from today? Everything? The day Dhouli was to finally enter the market place? Or is it that, for girls like Dhouli, nature accepted such a fate as only natural? The nature, which, after all, was not created by the Misras—or had the sky, the trees and the earth [been] sold out to the Misras as well?” (33).

Significantly, the effacement of the nature-civilization binary leads to a kind of identification between the two apparently dichotomous entities and suggests an ominous absorption and annihilation of nature by a soul-killing civilization. Like the world of civilization represented by the “metalled road” in the opening paragraph, nature at the conclusion of this short story remains apathetic to Dhouli’s exclusion from her own subaltern community. Mahasweta Devi, however, makes it clear through her narrative that the label of “Otherness” is conferred by the politics of power dynamics and the hegemony exercised and enjoyed by a privileged class. In the Panchayat meeting where Dhouli’s fate has been decided by the senior Misra, Dhouli is given two options—of being burnt alive, or having to adopt the path of prostitution in an
“Other world.” Hanumanji announced, Dhouli cannot practise prostitution in this village. She can go to some town, to Ranchi, and do her whoring there. If not, her house will be set on fire and mother, daughter, child will be burned to death.

It is significant and pertinent to note that even the tribal untouchables, the dusads and ganjus, do not make any protest against this verdict. The narrative thus overtly points to direct repression, which is the product of a societal power structure interlinked with the hegemony of a dominant class. An exposure of the outcome of the exploitation of power- the acceptance of the verdict of Hanumanji even by the marginalized- is shown to be the consequence of the created culture of the privileged, which results in the desertion by the marginalized of even one belonging to their own community.

In the story Shanichari, Mahasweta Devi presents the young tribal girl, Shanichari’s status in the social hierarchy. Shanichari, along with her grandmother enjoyed the train ride to Tohri, sitting on the floor of the [train] compartment, chugging along, having a good time picking the lice from each other’s hair. This oblique reference to Shanichari and her 108 grandmother’s subaltern state, suggested by the phrase.

Sitting on the floor of the [train] compartment, is further reinforced through an apparently innocuous folk-tale fragmentarily narrated by the grandmother: ‘Don’t you know the one [story] about the carpenter who carved a girl out of wood and became her father?’ The weaver who gave her clothes and became her brother? The goldsmiths who gifted her jewellery and became her uncles? Didn’t the sindoorwala [the seller of vermilion] bring her to life by giving her sindoor. The sindoorwala said, “I’ll marry the girl. I’ve given her sindoor. And so she’s mine.” (Outcast: Four stories, 35).
In quintessence, this story is reminiscent of the myth of the birth of Eve. As Eve was brought to life from out of Adam’s rib, so too was this girl carved from out of wood by a man and brought to life by the sindoor of another man, the Sindoorwala, who eventually possessed her. The implication of this tale inset in the very opening of the short story is that Shanichari will be treated as a commodity and thrown away as soon as she commodified existence becomes useless to the males in her life.

This implication becomes even more unambiguous with the coming of Hiralal, the itinerant folk-song singer who ekes out a living by singing his songs in train compartments. Hiralal, who is endowed by the author with an obvious choric function in the narrative unravels explicitly the woman, Gohuman’s wiles in trapping young girls like Shanichari. Employing sometimes an intimate conversational tone and sometimes a direct narrative and descriptive mode, Mahasweta exposes the devious ways in which tribal girls like “Shanichari felt the fangs of Gohuman.” (44) The tragic fate of tribal girls like Shanichari is explicitly presented by Mahasweta Devi in this short story. The Indian paramilitary forces sought to subjugate the tribal people by burning their huts, by looting their possessions and killing them, and by gang raping their women.

In a tone of cutting irony, Mahasweta Devi discriminates between the civilized mainstream reader, reading a short story about the condition of the exploited tribal sitting in his or her comfortable hearth and home, and the condition of the ‘Ho-Oraon-Mundra girls’. "The BMP [Bihar Military Police] took the young girls into the forest and raped them. Imagine the scene. Familiar to you, no doubt, from innumerable story books—the lush green forest and a group of Ho-Oraon-Mundra [three Indian tribes] girls who look as if they have
been exquisitely carved out of black stone. Only the bestial howls of the BMP would have been left out of such a picture-book scene.” (46). Even more relentlessly ironic is Mahasweta’s juxtaposition of a song of the tribal community:

“My girl could live on tubers,
Wear leafs and buds in her ears,
Alas, trees can’t grow clothes

“Dear Ma” my girl said, “So
To the brick kilns I must go
To the brick kilns I must go.” (47).

With the narrator’s wry observation-cum-question posed for the consideration of her readers: “Don’t some of you buy saris worth thousands of rupees every puja?” (46).

Driven out of her village and compelled to leave the inhospitable forests, Shanichari thus goes to the brick kilns to face a situation worse than her earlier one. There she is provided with clothes by the owner of the brick kiln, but only to be stripped and raped. “Rahamat would dress Shanichari in good clothes and nice jewellery, rub fragrant oil on her hair-and then tear into her ruthlessly” (51). Very soon she is replaced by another tribal girl and she began working as a Underpaid, half-fed, treated at best as sub-human and impregnated by the owner of the brick kiln, Shanichari returns at last to her people only to discover that she is an outcast in her own community. This final marginalization of Shanichari-her marginalization by the marginalized -is neatly presented through a dialogue between the brother of her murdered lover,
Chand Tirkey, and the naiga, the village head-priest: “We should think about this as a community. There could be more Shanicharis in the future. Should we cast out our own women? Will that benefit our society? The naiga said, They’ll think about it if it happens again. Not now.

In “The fairy tale of Rajabasha,” Mahasweta Devi, along with providing a graphic portrayal of the exploitation at all levels of Sarjom and Josmina, a tribal couple, projects certain instinctive reactions of the tribal people living below the poverty line to the minimum that they get, and finally records the behavioural patterns of the affluent people belonging to the mainstream. The story opens with the description of an arrangement of a tribal feast on the occasion of the marriage ceremony of Sarjom and Josmina, and we hear Sura Jonko saying: “Not just turmeric and salt, let’s cook it [the meat] with onions, pepper and other spices and the narrator voices their unuttered sentiment: “Great fun, great food.” (57).

The narrative voice then goes on to express the feeling of peace and happiness experienced by the couple even in the midst of their deprivation and poverty: Josmina collected roots and tubers from the forest. Living off just these and ghato made of makai, she looked gorgeous. A new mother, the curves of Josmina’s body filled out like the gushing Koyena in the months of rain. 3 A tribal girl who works in brick kiln. 110 There was much happiness and peace in this first chapter of the fairytale of Rajabasha. Later, after the cataclysmic upheaval in the lives of the couple caused by their being sent as slaves to Punjab as slaves and when they come back to their village, Mahasweta Devi’s description points to the minimum that a subaltern requires:

“Within no time everything became as it was before. It was so refreshing to bathe in the waters of the Koyena. So peaceful to boil some makai
at the end of the day and cook *ghato* in the evening. To sprinkle salt on it and eat on leaf plates. So pleasant to sit by the banks of the river, washing pots and pans while chatting to girls you’ve known all your life.” (78).

In contrast to the happiness of the couple even in the midst of poverty, Mahasweta Devi’s projection of Nandlal Sahu’s unhappiness in the midst of affluence is revealing: “He had two fine houses in the districts of Monoharpur and Raikera. And two wives [in contrast to Sarjom’s one hut and one wife] in those two houses. Now his first wife, who lived in Rajabasha, was pester ing him for a pucca brick house.” (59) So to fulfill the desire of his first wife, Nandlal sold Josmina and Sarjom to an ‘adarsh kisan [an ideal agriculturalist] of Punjab.’

Mahasweta Devi shows here that at the very core of the mainstream marginal issue lies the typical power dynamics of a feudal master-slave relationship in which the former treats the latter sometimes as a commodity and at other times as an instrument of labour, a beast of burden. This is why, while buying the couple, the Punjabi agriculturalist, Niranjan Singh, pinched Sarjom’s arm and shoulder muscles, and a little later when Josmina, gaping open-mouthed at everything around her, put a nipple to the child’s mouth,” Niranjan mused to feed her for a week and these goods will be just right.

Throughout the story, Mahasweta suggests that these subaltern people are nothing but “maal,” “goods,” commodities, “junglee jaanwars,” forest animals, to those at the top of the social hierarchy: To Niranjan, she [Josmina] was just fresh meat; dark, *jungle* [savage] flesh which he had paid for. They bought it all up, everything. Everything that belonged to the Josminas.
'No, I don’t.’
‘Then?’
‘I’m pregnant.’
‘My child?’
‘Yes.’
‘How can you be sure?’ (72).

Consequently, the master treated them as he pleased—subjected them to ‘16 to 18 hours’ labour,’ stripped and abused the wife in front of her child, and put them under lock and key at night. It was his [the master’s accomplice, Harchand’s,] job to keep the buffaloes, cows and bonded labour under lock and key. Then Jasmina said,

Listen con’t we escape?
‘How Jasmina?
‘By which rout did he bring us?’…(68).

But “The Fairytale of Rajabasha” is not merely about the exploitation of the tribal “Other.” After winning a reprieve from their slavery, Josmina and Sarjom come back to their tribal village. But their hopes of happiness are shattered when Josmina realizes that she is carrying the child of the Punjabi man who has raped her. Knowing that her own tribal community would never condone this, and that both she and her husband would be socially ostracized, Josmina drowns herself in the Koyena river on the banks of which she and Sarjom spent so many idyllic moments before.
One way to look at these short stories of Mahasweta Devi is to read them as the voiced articulations of the tribal “Others” in contemporary Indian society. Gayatri Spivak’s answer to the question as to whether the subaltern can speak has been resoundingly in the negative. Yet, it is important to note that Mahasweta Devi speaks not only about the marginalized, but, far more importantly, about the marginalized within the communities of the marginalized. Her voice does not simply ventriloquise the plight of those at the edges of civilization, but goes deeper to analyse and reflect upon how the power structures that engender marginalization are replicated in the texture of the society of the marginal.

The point is that the author’s sympathy unearths the reality of an exploitation concealed within the truth of another and the more obvious exploitation. Thus, Mahasweta’s true concern is with a subalternity subsumed within a larger parameter of subalternity. In a sense, this is a deeply humanistic perception, one that is as incisive as an insight into human reality, as a deep and penetrating social understanding.

In “Outcast: Four Stories”, Mahasweta Dei’s acute and perceptive pen brings to life with a deep empathy and sensitivity the life stories of four women-Dhouli, Shanichari, Josmina, Chinta—all from the most oppressed, marginalized segments of society. Whether it is Dhouli, the young Dusad who finds herself an outcast in her own village, Shanichari, the Oregon girl who is forced into working in the brick-kilns outside Calcutta, Josmina,, the Ho tribal who with her husband, gets sucked into the racket of trade in cheap coolie labour, or Chinta, a Brahmin widow whose caste is no protection against the harsh social structures that force her into working as a part-time maid in Calcutta, the life stories of all these women have one thing in common—i.e the
unending class, caste and gender exploitation which makes their lives a relentless struggle for survival. Mahasweta Devi’s acute and perceptive pen makes these women step out of the margins of society to live in our minds, impressive in their quiet courage and tenacity, and in their will to survive.

Stories around the four low caste or untouchable women indicate in Outcast: Four Stories indicate that they are not simply stunned victims controlled by the will of others but are also subtle agents of normative change in their communities. Even if they are helpless and thoroughly abused by institutional norms or individual lusts, at least someone like Shanichari, who is enticed by a procuress and sexually molested by an owner of brick kilns, can be imagined to be pointing her accusing finger in a freeze shot. The author's two 1981 articles reprinted in the appendices describe the grim reality of exploitation and oppression of tribal bonded laborers and migrant workers.

One of them is a direct counterpart of the story of Shanichari in which she speaks of the method, around the brick kiln areas of the Chaibasa-Chakradharpur region, of sending aged Adivasi women sardars (like the story's Gohuman), who often are exconcubines of the kiln owners, to remote villages and village hats to lure young girls with promises of good jobs. On the other hand, the role of the Bihar administration is mighty dismal. It realizes, for example, dozens of crores both from the forests of Chotanagpur and from the Excise Department, let alone the income of the contractors. This is how the ring of exploitation thrives and foul recruiters continue to land up in destitute villages.

The literary works of Mahasweta Devi have been translated widely into various Indian languages. But what is commendable about Seagull's publishing program to have her representational works translated into English
is that the English reading public, well beyond the frontiers of India, could now have access to her socially-committed literature.

But even as a 'faithful bigamist,' any translator of her works is faced with a difficult task to deal with their original and distinct flavours due to her absorption and use of local and oral history and her use of words which are far from being available in any standard dictionary. However, with the books under review, the translators have worked closely with the author to avoid misreading. Even, at times, English equivalents of Indian words, easily found in dictionaries, are rejected to retain the originals with or without italics. Further, each of the books ends with copious glossaries or notes of the author's enriching use of Bengali which includes tribal dialects. However, despite an exhaustive glossary, a few words like *chapayia, Sarjomba, bhatta* in *Outcast*, for example – are not included in it.

Mahasweta Devi’s *Outcast: Four Stories* can be read as the voiced articulations of the tribal ‘Others.’ Debasish Chattopadhyay suggests that Mahasweta Devi’s voice does not simply ventriloquism the plight of those at the edges of civilization, but goes deeper to analyze and reflect upon how the power structures that engender marginalization are replicated in the texture of the society of the marginalized.

*Outcast: Four Short Stories* deals with the fate of four women characters that, belong to the ‘Other’ world, who are doubly marginalized and looked down upon even by those who are usually regarded as marginalized in Indian society. Dalit literature is generic in the sense that all other marginalized and oppressed groups of people are under its sway and sweep. It has struck a keynote awaking their conciseness for forging their identities. It has given
ample inspiration and insight to the writers emerging from tribal and nomadic communities.

Even now a large majority of women are engaged in unclean, inferior occupation such as sweeping, scavenging and working in dumping grounds, rag-picking and also in prostitution. These women have to face steep discrimination in the matters of social relations and employment due to their engagement in these occupations. Women constitute half of total population, but are unable to get equal share in active politics. Dalit Women also faced many problems in performing their duties due to illiteracy, lack of information and dependency on the male members of their families.

Women who belong to weaker section of society such as Dalits and Adivasis have realized their double exploitation, double inequality and double injustice. There is a double jeopardy. The empowerment can be achieved only through education, employment and equality which are the sum and substance of Ambedkar’s liberation movement. Dalit’s problem and women’s problem are products of Chaturvarna. Manusmrithi denied education to women.

Mahasweta Devi feels that the gap between the rich and the poor is now widening very fast and the Tribals, Dalits and minorities are at the receiving end. She is against mining, as they deprive Tribals and the poor living in rural areas. Their land and livelihood is grabbed in name of development without any proper compensation. She claims that the sufferers, the victims the innocents are often turned as terrorists and the state uses arbitrary powers to subjugate the rights of the minorities. A strong undercurrent of empathy for them can be observed in her writings.
“I am a woman,
and I am writing,
but I am not
writing of women
alone. What I am
writing...is about
class exploitation.”